SCOTTISH SONGS.

TO

SIR WALTER SCOTT, BART.

TO speak in your presence of Scottish song—to hope you will listen while I seek to trace its history, describe its varied character, and, with an honest heart and a liberal mind, examine the productions of the lyrists of our native land, seems something like the man who spoke to the sun concerning the source of light: for who can know so much about lyric lore, or bring so much knowledge and genius to illustrate it, as yourself? In supposing myself seated beside you with free license of speech, I imagine your patience equal at least to my presumption; for I cannot but know that you have nothing to learn, nor can I hope to charm you into an auditor by any extraordinary grace of language, or felicity of remark. Something indeed of what I have to say has been learned from yourself: I am unwilling to be thought so careless a reader and so dull a friend, as to come profitless away from your company or your works. It may seem a piece of tyranny unknown in literature, to echo back your own words in your own ear; but it is for another purpose that I suppose you so near me—

your presence will have a favourable influence over a spirit, which, though it comes gladly to an elected work, is conscious of its defects, and will be willing to imagine itself admonished into more than ordinary conciseness and regularity, by the presence of superior genius. This will likewise enable me to escape from the nice formalities and subtle distinctions of a regular essay, into the more pleasant labour of a desultory introduction; where character may be more closely observed than method, where the fixed or the vagrant graces of song will be traced more anxiously than the works through which they have wandered, from their first appearance till now; and where I shall sometimes gladly resign the hopeless task of finding era and author to our ancient lyrics, for the more agreeable labour of illustrating them by criticism and anecdote. I shall endeavour to remember that brevity is a flower that never blooms out of season—that he who wishes to be read, must write to be understood; and that, though trusting more for my success to nature than education, I must seek the aid of both in a work where information and research are required: what cannot be got by nature's voluntary light, may be found by the lantern of learning.

When literature slackened in its homage to men of riches and rank, painting and sculpture came and reflected back to titled pride and opulent vanity their own image, with such minuteness and felicity of resemblance, as rendered all opposition from the pen hopeless and vain. As dedications are therefore uncommon or unknown, it may be expected that I should assign some

reason for departing from the ordinary course of authors: it is from no wish to seem singular, nor from any desire to revive those acts of sometimes blamable and always involuntary homage, with which some of the greatest of men sought to propitiate some of the meanest. Had you owed your greatness to birth or to favour alone, I should have regarded you in silence as one of those gilded images which fortune sets up for worship on her high places: but your fame comes from a nobler source—from that influence which much wiser men than I am have not scrupled to call divine; from that art unteachable, untaught, which can neither be created nor propagated. My admiration is therefore voluntary—a natural impulse which I wish not to conceal, which I might not if I would; which pride feels no wound to own, nor independence less erectness in acknowledging. I shall now proceed with the subject,—though it seems no great symptom of wandering, to speak of a poet in an introduction to song.

I am inclined to claim for the very oldest of our Scottish songs, a moderate antiquity and a humble origin. The greatest lover of Scotland, will be unable to find the wild flowers of her lyric verse floating farther up the stream of her history than the reign of Robert Bruce: and the fondest admirer of her song cannot point to a surer source for its purest and most lasting strains, than to our herdsmen and warriors. Those who wish to find its origin among the wild and shadowy traditions of the original people of the land, ought to tell us why the

lyric muse has confined her melting and heroic breathings to a long, narrow, and sometimes barren strip of border country; and those who imagine we have received the impulse from the south, should show us some of those coeval traditionary strains which inspired our ancestors. I am telling the story for England as well as for ourselves, when I say, that almost all our romantic or martial ballads, and almost all our songs which bear the peculiar stamp of remoter times, and claim distinction from the tales they tell, or the names they celebrate, find a local habitation nigh the border. Nothing can be more remarkable than the similarity in character and feeling of the strains, whether of peace or war, or love or sorrow, which were breathed of old from either bank of the Tweed; and nothing can be more certain than that this resemblance has long since ceased, and that England has changed the natural tone and peculiar character of her song. That she has changed for the better I am not so sure,—let me weigh the merits of Scottish and English song with a careful and impartial hand.

When Cowley speaks of "dancing words and speaking strings," he expresses with much happiness the felicitous union of poetry and music. The natural unstudied grace of thought, the lucky ease and unsought beauty of language which make lyric verse move and breathe, and without which it is unworthy of the society of Music, its less divine but no less graceful sister, seem common to both countries. Here the resemblance ceases—a Scottish song is a story, an English song is a sentiment; the former seems more akin to truth and warmth, the latter to court-

liness and delicacy. The Scotsman mingles the name of his mistress with his strain; and lavishes loveliness and beauty upon her, and assembles around her all that is fair or fragrant in the evening landscape: the Englishman conceals his mistress in a foreign mask; and pours his fancy more than his heart around a natural sentiment or a neat conceit, adorning it with all the elegance and melody of a rich and varied language. The former sings openly of his affection, and describes his hopes and fears with all the candour of youthful enthusiasm: the latter has no wish to make the wide world his confidante; he is discreet in his most rapturous moments, and understands from experience all the mystery of love-making. The former thinks of nothing but his love, and seems proud to let the world know how much he admires her, and how passing fair she is for whom he is pouring out his whole heart: the latter neither trusts us with his true love's name, nor with a portrait of her person, nor is he in any haste to discover in what land she lives, or whether she be lofty or low. The former goes out to woo in a pastoral land, and inanimate nature comes in for its share of rapture; he tells us of the stars which shine above them, and the names of the flowers over which they walk;—the sweetness of the hawthorn under which they sit is not forgotten, and the stream at their feet has a name, or acquires one from that moment: the latter indulges in no such pastoral imaginings, he sits under a painted ceiling and a gilded chandelier, and makes love

When the wine cup shines in light.

The lyric muse of the north is the muse of simple nature: she loves to expatiate by hill and dale, with her locks flowing on her shoulders, her garments lifted above the grass "till half a leg is scrimply seen," and with a look like the Peggy of Allan Ramsay when she went to gather dew. Her more courtly sister of the south loves the lighted hall and the illuminated city: she goes rustling in silks, with paste gems and diamonds in her hair, is a complete pattern of external grace and decorum of behaviour—

> And prudence is her o'erword aye;
> She talks of rank and fashion.

If I have to accuse the latter of reserve, and with breathing out her love as coldly as the icy words of some of the old lecturing Moralities, I am afraid I shall not be able to excuse the former of occasional trespasses against outward decorum, and with going higher kilted at times than even the tolerant may think discreet. But perhaps this very freedom arises from the dramatic form in which our northern songs, like all early national poetry, are conceived. In their lively presentation of person and incident, and time and place, they resemble a dramatic scene; and as many of them contain pictures of common life, there has been less desire to extract the poetry alone, than to stamp freshly off the whole scene, and reflect back a true image of nature. A total want of dramatic incident and character, and a desire to address the mind alone, has secured to English song the welcome absence of familiar coarseness and rude interchange of

speech, which augment, at the same time, the life and the indelicacy of some of our early songs. This desire to limit itself to a single sentiment, and intertwine all the grace of verse round a smart saying or a happy conceit, led an English critic to imagine that whatever went further than this ceased to be song. This seems the definition of one who had a better acquaintance with the latter than the elder lyrics of England; but I cannot consent to withhold from the popular poetry of the Gothic nations, the very name, both oral and written, by which it was admired and descended to posterity. I am willing to be no wiser than our ancestors, who refused not the name of song to much that could be sung; and were pleased to include many long ballads and portions of romance in the poetry to which voice and instrument added their charms. The very nature of love, its joys, its sorrows, and its fears, must induce it to overflow those pedantic limits into which the critic's wand wishes to conjure it. The heart desires to disclose something more than the solitary sentiment enjoined by the critic. The passion of love, like the muse of Burns, rages like an imprisoned fiend till it pours out itself in song; and all the liveliest revelations of the heart, bear the name and form, and breathe of the beauty which inspired them.

To seek, with the hope of finding, a certain era for the origin of Scottish song, would be like the boy who chased the rainbow:—when he reached the knoll on which its glittering extremity seemed to rest, he saw it shining on a distant hill; and when he succeeded in gaining the summit, he saw the beautiful vision vanishing in the

ocean. We see before us a large mass of lyrics, such as perhaps no nation can surpass, either in number or beauty: we look a hundred years back, and the number is sensibly diminished, and many of the brightest are gone: we pass onward a hundred years more, and we see many of our present favourites in a ruder dress, and hear the muse breathe a rougher and less melodious strain; another century, and there are frequent lapses and chasms in traditionary verse, and the voice of the muse is more rude and martial; another century and her musings are scattered in fragments over the land like the ravings of the sibyl; and, finally, her voice has ceased, and history is content to quote a verse and speak of the influence of her song. The skill of learning, the labour of industry, and the utmost application which genius can make to the pages of the chronicler and the historian, can only end in the conviction, that song of a domestic and a martial kind has been long natural to Scotland; but truth must call in the aid of conjecture, and conjecture must seek the assistance of national vanity, before we can satisfy ourselves that we possess, without a very strong infusion of recent poetry, change of language, and alteration of thought, any one of the perfect original strains which gratified our ancestors. Credulity may believe that the songs which cheered our rude and martial forefathers, breathed the same varied strain, and contained the seeds from which our innumerable songs have sprung; and fancy may imagine how much or how little of the ancient spirit of poetry influences the court, the camp, and cottage now, which was abroad of old, and sang, like Dante or Cary,

Of ladies and of knights, the toils and ease
That witched us into love and courtesy.

It is an ungrateful labour to dispel agreeable delusions; and the fictions which soothe national pride, or please family vanity, are those to which we most fondly cling. But when truth strips the romance from history, and seeks the proofs by which we lay claim to lyrical antiquity, we find nothing left of all those primitive strains, which gave a Scottish tongue to our national melodies, but a few rude lines and a few questionable fragments. It is easy indeed to say, that everywhere we see traces of the national muse of earlier days,—that we discover over all the border lowlands her footsteps more than half defaced, and hear her well-known voice dying away like the last murmur of a distant melody. But truth is not allowed to make her escape in general expressions: what history has preserved, or veritable tradition handed down, I shall gladly notice; and I may lament, with the poet of old, the ravages of time and the imperfections of oral remembrance, and that, unless we are aided by revelation, we know little more than nothing.

The period when the Scottish language began to be heard above the barbarous discordance of the conquering and the conquered, cannot be accurately known; and it is equally vain to seek to be informed, at what time it flowed in a stream pure and plentiful enough for the uses of the muse. There must have been a large interval of years, while the Celtic language was step by step retiring to the northern hills, and the present language was

secretly moulding itself on the Saxon, the Danish, and the Norman, in which our poetry appeared of many colours, and caught a strip and a star from every fresh infusion from the west or the south. That our earliest poets spoke a kind of Babylonish dialect, fit to confound the united wisdom of many colleges, I am not prepared to say; but it is much easier to prove that the peculiar poetry of the various tribes or nations who turned England and Scotland into a prize-fighter's stage, gave a tinge or an impulse, which is yet visible in the popular poetry of the land. If we can indulge in the pleasing belief that Fingal lived and that Ossian sang; and if we are to judge of the aspirations of the Celtic muse by the wild, and pathetic, and chivalrous strains which were so long and so wondrously preserved for Macpherson to find, we may conclude that the lowland muse owes less to her Celtic sister than to the wild legends of the Norwegians and Danes. The Scottish and the Scandinavian ballads or songs have a close and a vivid resemblance: the same spirit seems to have conceived, and the same spirit executed them. They abound in the same wild and singular superstitions; the same thirst for the marvellous by sea, and the incredible by land. They present an image of a rude, a martial, and original people: might is their source of right; personal beauty and personal bravery are their only visible perfections; their ships are their homes, the field of battle their delight; plunder their reward; and the chief judge and arbitrator in all dubious matters is the sword. Blood flows, through their romantic as well as their

martial strains; and if they draw images of female loveliness and beauty, it is but to throw them into the arms of the savage hero of the tale, or upon the sword point of some fiercer rival. But steeped as they are in superstition and in blood, they have many redeeming graces of graphic power, rude chivalry and fervent pathos. They exhibit that sharp and fresh presentment of incident and scene, which will ever be found in the songs of those who seek to see nature for themselves. They have the fire-edge of first thought strong upon them, with that minuteness and particularity, which make fiction speak with the tongue of truth.

In much of this energy of character the Celtic poetry shares; but its manners are more refined, its sentiments more generous, its superstitions more sublime, and its chivalry rivals the brightest era of European knighthood. I speak of the character of the epic songs of Ossian, which, hidden like a miraculous relic for more than a thousand years, came forth to support the expiring traditions of the land, and to revive the fame of the ancient heroes, who were about to retire for ever, nameless and unsung, to their wreaths of mountain mist, to drive their visionary cars and pursue the shadowy deer. The other remains of Celtic song, which I have examined, seem to describe a ruder and less gifted people; they delight in catalogues of barbarous names—in clusters of sonorous epithets and interminable traditions. They seem barren in generosity of sentiment; their story is some nameless feud; and their imagery is limited to the heathy desert and the misty waste. The summons to the foray, the

call to battle, and the rushing to the charge, are favourite themes. The Celtic bards are unequalled in their stirring calls to arms, and for

Chanting rhymes of deadly feud.

But I am far from sure that they have influenced the border poets in their choice of subjects, or in the manner in which they have treated them.

By examining the expression and spirit of our early national poetry, written and oral, by perusing the ancient historians and writers of England and the Scottish lowlands, and by weighing, as well as a limited balance will allow, the popular language of the two countries, I may safely conclude, that they are peopled by one race, who spoke of old the same language, who were sprung from the same ancestry, and were divided in nothing save the desire of dominion. When the Saxon language was inoculated with the Danish, and coloured with the Norman, it found time to subside into something fixed and settled, and its voice was gradually heard over the island as far, and perhaps farther, than the banks of the Forth. To a Scotsman the ancient literature of England is quite accessible, and comes closer to his mother-tongue than the more pure and more polished, but not more forcible, literary language of the present day. Many of the words of Wickliffe and Chaucer, and even of Shakespeare, have ceased to be living English, and are still living Scotch; and I cannot help imagining that the language of the land might recover some of its lost strength, by calling into life and popularity many of its neglected

words. The whole of the populous county of York speaks a language which I am willing to call Scottish, since I understand it through means of my native tongue; and various other northern counties give a very lively image in their speech of the days of Chaucer and Barbour. A poet and critic has acknowledged, that Barbour adorned the English language by a strain of versification, expression, and imagery, far superior to his age; and I may say of Wintoun, who wrote at a later period, that his language is more rude and his orthography more impure, inasmuch as his genius was inferior. When we come to the days of Gawin Douglas and Dunbar, we are so sensible of the difference between the language which they write, and that of the poets of England who immediately follow them, that we are almost tempted to imagine that the northern tongue, instead of advancing in correctness and purity, had relapsed into obsolete ruggedness and uncouth barbarism. I have no wish to refuse my admiration to the works of these two exquisite poets; they can afford to be accused of an affectation of uncommon words, of a wish to embellish what Sir David Lyndsay calls the "maternal tongue" with "aureate termis." But they have refused to speak the popular language of their country; and by studding their verses with learned words, have become more inaccessible to a common reader than the pages of Barbour, who wrote so long before them.

But while the more courtly and more learned poets were sacrificing the sense of genius to show the vanity of learning, the oral lyric poetry of Scotland had in-

sensibly become popular, and its authors seem to have indulged no higher wish than to express what they felt, and describe what they saw, in the common work-day-world language of their native country. But if the rustic authors were unacquainted with the unfortunate art of embellishing their strains, it must be confessed that they were content with very homely words, paid little regard to regularity of rhyme, and satisfied themselves with very rugged numbers. Though it is said by some learned persons that the first language of man is poetry, I am afraid to claim for our ancestors the name of poets in their first recorded attempts at verse. Wintoun indeed has quoted a portion of a lyric poem, which is very sweet and flowing; and as it is written on the unhappy wars which followed the death of Alexander the Third, it has been pronounced as old as the days of John Baliol. But to me it has a much more modern sound. It is too melodious and too alliterative for that period, and seems to be of the same age as the rhyming chronicler himself. It glides as smoothly along as the numbers of the present day:—

When Alexander our king was dead,
That Scotland led in love and le,
Away wes sons of ale and bread,
Of wine and wax, of game and glee;
Our gold was changed into lead:
Christ, born into virginitie,
Succour Scotland, and remede
That stad in this perplexitie.

I know that Leyden, no mean authority, quotes and embellishes it as a relic of the age to which the Prior of Lochleven ascribes it, and that Ritson, the most suspicious of critics, and the most scrupulous of antiquaries, regards the verse as genuine. But Leyden perhaps spoke hastily, and at least spoke young, and as he was not in pursuit of truth, might see nothing meritorious in seeking a less ambitious antiquity for the verse; and with regard to Ritson, experience has taught me to abate my confidence in even the most considerate judgment of a mere antiquary.

But we have a fragment of a national song on which suspicion has not fastened; and of an age, too, which lessens regret for the dubious authenticity of the other. I overpass, and overpass willingly, some very rude rhymes on the siege of Berwick in 1296: the minstrel scoff was repaid by the English with rhymes equally barbarous; and as if the reply of the rhymer had not been sufficiently keen, the sword of Edward followed, far sharper than the severest satire. I also overpass the song of Sir Patrick Spence, the earliest of our lyrics, which sought to unite sentiment with external nature and domestic or historic circumstance; and I pass it only, because I am unwilling, from internal evidence and traditional testimony alone, to place it at the head of Scottish song. Nor shall I dwell on the Gude Wallace, a rough and vigorous lyric, bearing in various places the sharp stamp of great antiquity, and in others the softer and more sentimental infusion of a later age. The latter is one of those songs which has floated down the stream of oral memory

for centuries; and perhaps was popular in an era, which we have Fordun's authority for saying, possessed several songs in honour of Sir William Wallace. But I gladly go from conjecture to certainty.

After the battle of Bannockburn, says Fabyan, "The Scottes, inflamed with pride and derision of the English, made this rhyme as followeth—

Maydens of Englande,
Sore may ye morne,
For your lemmans, ye
Haue lost at Bannockysburne.
With heue-a-lowe,
What weneth the king of England
So soon to have won Scotland?
Wyth rumbylowe.

"Thys song," he adds, "was after many days sung in dances in the carols of the maidens and mynstrelles of Scotland, to the reproofe and disdain of Englishmen: with diuers others which I overpasse." The testimony of the old historian is supported by Caxton's Chronicle, which gives us some farther information respecting this very curious relic:—"Wherefore the Scottes said, in reproof and despite of King Edward, for as moche as he loved to be gone by water, and also for he was discomfited at Bannokesborne; therefore maydens made a song thereof in that country of King Edward of England, and in this manner they songe—" The quotation of Caxton extends no farther than that of Fabyan, and seems much more corrupt. But it enables us to judge

of the mixed nature of the song. It seems something of a lyrical condolence, as well as a song in "disdain and reproof" of English pride. It sympathizes with the maidens who had lost their lovers; and compares the magnificence of Edward's march to Bannockburn with the shame of his flight and his escape in a fishing-boat. This very early and not inelegant strain is more sweet and flowing than the popular English verses of the same period; it commences in the gentle spirit of our best lyrics, and strikes with truth and modesty the true tone of our best and most moving songs. I should have considered it as a song rather of sorrow than of scorn, had not Caxton supplied the satiric allusion to Edward's flight, and had I not discovered that the burthen was also satirical. In the romance of Richard Cœur de Lion, as the English fleet sailed towards the coast of Syria, the minstrel sings, that the king saw a large Saracen ship of war, and, arming himself for the fight, urged on his rowers with characteristic impatience:—

> Roweth on fast! who that is faint,
> In evil water may he be dreynt!
> They rowed hard, and sung thereto,
> With hevelow and rumbeloo.

The Scottish poets of the days of Bruce knew how to make a singular line, from a popular English romance, sharpen the satire of a lyric, which was once so well known as to be quoted by three historians. I know not whether it is to the English romance or the Scottish song that King James alludes in his Peblis to the Play.

Hope, Calye, and Cardronow,
Gathered out thick-fold,
With heigh, and how, rumbelow,
The young folks were full bold:
The bagpipe blew, and they outthrew,
Out of the towns untold;
Lord! such a shout was them among,
When they were o'er the wold!

As this is the first genuine fragment of what is now widely known by the name of Scottish song, so is it the last that for a long space of time finds a place in history. With the exception of a few fragments of a satiric rather than a pathetic kind, and many names of lyrics once common and popular, we have nothing of all the strains which amused or moved our ancestors till printing came to the aid of the muse, and men, from vanity or curiosity, began to collect her labours. The early flowers of our song are soon collected from the wide field of history; they are few, and when they are together, the garland seems hardly worthy of gathering. The next that comes has something of the sharpness of the national emblem—an epigram rather than a song; but so pointed and keen, that in those days of fierce chivalry, it may have caused the breaking of many a lance. When David, the son of Robert Bruce, married Jane, the sister of King Edward, in 1328, the Scots in scorn called her Jane Make-peace, and wrote various Truffes, Roundes, and Songs, in derision of the alliance, and of the costly and gaudy dresses of the En-

glish knights. We owe the following satiric verse to the kindness of Fabyan; and from Caxton we learn, that it was fixed on the doors of the Cathedral Church at York by the Scottish ambassadors, during the residence of the court in the north. It sounds like a part of a song:—

Long beardis hartles,
Paynted hoodes wytles,
Gay cottes graceless,
Maketh England thryfteless.

The poetic and satiric spirit of the north is further illustrated by the curious story which Bower relates of Sir William Dalyell; and which is told with such liveliness in the notes to Marmion, as makes me afraid to attempt an abridgment. It seems that in 1390, the Scottish knight, whom the historian praises for his wisdom and his lively wit, was on a mission to the English court, where he saw Sir Piers Courtenay parading about the palace, wearing a rich mantle, bearing for device an embroidered falcon, with this rhyme—

I bear a falcon fairest of flight;
Whoso pinches at her, his death is dight
In graith.

Sir William appeared next day in a rich mantle, similar to that of Courtenay, bearing a magpie instead of a falcon, with a motto which parodied the vaunting inscription of the Englishman.

I bear a pie, picking at a piece;
Whoso picks at her, I shall pick at his nese,
In faith.

Sir Piers, who was vain of a very handsome person and renowned for his skill in tilting, challenged Sir William to a just with sharp lances. They ran three courses, and in the third, the handsome Englishman lost two of his front teeth: he complained that Dalyell left his helmet unlaced, which gave way at the touch of his spear, and enabled him to shun the shock of the encounter. The Scot agreed to run six courses more, liable to the forfeit of two hundred pounds, if, on entering the lists, any unequal advantage should be detected on either side. When they were on the point of closing, Dalyell demanded, with a smile, that Courtenay should consent to the extinction of one of his eyes, as he himself had lost one in the field of Otterburne. The other demurred to the equalization of optical powers, and the king commanded that Dalyell should receive the forfeit, saying he excelled the English both in wit and valour. It is not every old historian who illustrates the age of which he writes with a story of rich humour and sarcastic rhyme.

For the sake of keeping together these satiric verses, I have omitted to mention the remains of a song quoted by Godscroft, on the murder of the lord of Liddesdale in 1353. I know not that by delaying it I have offered any violence to precedence of composition; for I confess the lines have no very antique sound, and certainly enjoyed the benefit of oral transmission for some time before they reached the ear of the historian of the house of Douglas.

"The lord of Liddesdale being at his pastime, hunting

in Ettricke Forest, is beset by William Earl of Douglas, and assailed, wounded, and slain beside Galsewood; upon a jealousy that the earl had conceived of him with his lady, as the report goeth; for so says the old song—

The countesse of Douglas out of her boure she came,
And loudly there that she did call,
It is for the lord of Liddesdale
That I let all these tears downfall.

"The song also declareth how she did write her love-letters to Liddesdale, to dissuade him from that hunting. It tells likewise the manner of the taking of his men, and his own killing at Galsewood; and how he was carried the first night to Lindin Kirk, a mile from Selkirk, and was buried within the abbacie of Melrose." To express joy, or scorn, or sorrow, on any remarkable occurrence, was the custom of the ancient muse; her subjects were real, or believed: fiction was not become a profession, she had

No idly feigned poetic pains,

she dealt only in national or domestic history. It was not likely, therefore, that the fall of a favourite and successful hero would escape such notice; but there is no better authority than this oral song for charging Earl Douglas with jealousy, and his lady with light behaviour. History imputes the murder of the Flower of Chivalry to other causes; and it must be confessed, that though he deserved not to be murdered, he hardly merited to live. I am therefore of opinion, that the song was

written by some minstrel, so long after the event it celebrates, that length of time sanctioned the fiction. Such expressions as Godscroft, on the authority of the song, imputes to the countess, were common among ladies in the times of chivalry, and implied admiration rather than criminal affection. The queen of France wrote with her own hand a love-letter to our James the Fourth, calling him her love; and desiring him to raise an army, and step three steps on English ground, and strike three strokes with a sword, for her sake. We all know how readily he obeyed; and the price which he paid, dear as it was, would have been more willingly given, could he have foreseen on Flodden Field the heroic poem which his fate has inspired. But no one accuses the queen of France of an attachment to James, and no one imagines that James regarded her more tenderly than any other lady. Her letter was the common language of the times —the words of politic beauty in the ear of chivalrous vanity. Nor was the kiss which the Princess Margaret of Scotland bestowed on Alain Chartier, while asleep in the palace gallery, regarded by her ladies of honour as very improper, or indecorous: a kiss which Menage says will immortalize her. It was a salute according to the precepts, or, at least, the spirit, of chivalry; and the excuse of the princess was in the same strain,—she did not kiss the man, but the mouth which had uttered so many fine sayings.

Were I to suppose this curious fragment to be the earliest specimen we have of the language and spirit of chivalry employed in song, it might be imagined that I

am ignorant of the romantic song of True Thomas, in which chivalry seems in the dawn; and the historical romance of Barbour, a poem of which Scotland may be justly proud. The first is a wild fiction, created more for the sake of embalming a popular superstition than for indulging in prophecy; and it unites the common belief of the people with all the magnificence of an Arabian tale. The second is the adventures of the great Robert Bruce and his illustrious companions, where poetry is called in to adorn truth, and render accurate and unimpeachable history more lively and agreeable. Nothing can surpass the ease and readiness with which the poet pours the stream of a fine imagination and a tender heart round the varied fortunes of his heroes, and seizes on all the poetical features and incidents which animate narration and elevate story. Fancy here is the servant, not the master, of fact; and imagination is made the vassal of a sober and deliberate judgment. Yet, scorning to use what king James calls the "flowered pen," he is more romantic than romance; and has breathed a heroism and tenderness through a period of peril and blood, which has communicated itself to the rudest strains of our minstrelsy. He has stamped in poetry the chivalrous deeds, and manners, and feelings of the Scottish people; and given a living spirit of nationality, to what he, with unexpected modesty, calls a romance. He is the Froissart of our country; with equal spirit and graphic power, but with a kinder and tenderer heart. I wish I could have discovered in his narratives more frequent traces of our ancient national songs;

but the Scottish historians have been exceedingly penurious in such quotation, and we owe more to honest Fabyan than to all the chroniclers of the north. Barbour indeed forbears to relate the defeat of Sir Andrew Harcla, by Sir John de Soulis, the Scottish governor of Eskdale, inasmuch as it was so fully rehearsed in a popular song that it required no comment:

> Young women, when they will play,
> Sing it among them ilka day.

This is an authentic reference to a very early song; for John de Soulis, knight of Torthorwald in Dumfriesshire, governor of Eskdale, and grandson of Nicholas de Soulis, the competitor with Bruce for the crown, was slain, along with Edward Bruce and many gallant warriors, at the battle of Fagher in Ireland, in 1318.

I have been mixing romance with history, ancient times with latter; and introducing a princess of Scotland before I introduced her more illustrious father, James the First. To this accomplished prince, the author of our first serious and purely imaginative poem, the King's Quair, and our earliest truly comic and humorous and homely poem, Peblis to the Play, Major assigns the reputation of composing many excellent Scottish songs, which were popular while the historian wrote; and Tassoni ascribes to him the composition of many sacred pieces of vocal music, and also the invention of a new kind of music, plaintive and melancholy, and different from all others. No one has contested the king's poetical honours; but the assertion of

the Italian has stirred up all the fiddlers and pipers of the north and south—all alike anxious to defend the antiquity of the several sorts of composition, and afraid to impute the invention of a new kind of melody to a mere mortal. They seem unwilling to believe that the strains which their instruments emit originate in a meaner place than above; and turn in disdain from the claim of King James, to ascend among the mists of antiquity, in search of the fountain from which the national music has flowed. Without consulting the Druid under his oak,—or seeking melody from a painted Pict or a naked Caledonian,—or inquiring from tradition what tune Wallace played when he visited the English host, disguised as a harper,—or pausing to consider the nature of the sound which the Scottish horns made when Lord Douglas wasted the north of England, which Froissart declares was as infamous as if all the devils in hell had been there,—let me state my own feelings in a matter of mere belief; for who can hope that history, having left song unnoticed, would condescend to chronicle sound?

If our Scottish song has preserved its ancient character,—and it has, else the fragments which have descended to us have deceived me,—I think there can be little doubt that our music and poetry were coeval, or twin-born. It is evident from the gliding ease and peculiar structure of the verse, that our early songs, written as well as oral, have been composed to be sung; for no man will readily compose a successful song, without accompanying the act of composition with a kind of subdued or audible chant, in the spirit of the air to which he

wishes it to be sung. He who would conceive song must be under the influence of some kind of harmony; and though he may not be able to sing, he must have that internal sense of melody which will make his words flow in unison with music. There is much narrative as well as lyric poetry composed under the impulse of music; in many passages of Marmion, and the Lady of the Lake, I can hardly resist breaking out into an involuntary chant as I peruse them. If I am told that the author has not the art or the power of giving audible utterance to song, my answer is, that he is inaudibly melodious, and fully possessed with the spirit of music: else how would his poetry rouse and animate me into singing? But there is a farther proof of the early alliance of poetry and music, which I hope others have felt as well as myself, else it almost looks too strange to obtain credit. When I was a boy, and committed to memory many of our ancient as well as modern songs, I never learned one of them without making myself master of some kind of melody which re-echoed the words; and, curious to say, most of those airs which the words suggested corresponded, I afterwards found, in a great measure with the proper tune! The nature of the song and the distribution of its emphatic words suggested the general character and spirit of the air. I am inclined to consider many of our melodies exceedingly old; and that the melodies, which Tassoni attributes to the genius of King James, were only new creations in the feeling and character of what was already popular.

I gladly return to the poetry of James: but we can-

not expect to find in an allegorical poem, written in prison at the age of nineteen, any lively sketches of manners, or paintings of an historical or domestic kind—for which he seems to have been eminently gifted. Nor can I observe any allusion to the lyrics of his native land. But though song is not directly noticed, he has given some of the sweetest examples of musical versification, and such vivid sketches of silent nature, as were unequalled in poetry, whether Scottish or English, at the period he wrote. We see every where traces of his fondness for melody, and the influence which beauty, the song of birds, and the budding trees, had upon his heart and his fancy. We feel a wish to join in what Gray so beautifully calls

The untaught harmony of spring,

when the royal poet gives his birds human utterance:

Come sing with us, Away, winter away!
Come, summer, come, the sweet season and sun.

His poetry has never been praised so highly as it deserves. It has a modesty and delicacy unknown among the elder worthies of English verse. The loss of his lyrics, if they were conceived with equal spirit, and executed with equal happiness of language and sense of nature and melody, is a loss which we may well deplore. In his Peblis to the Play, a poem full of rustic festivity and mirth and broil, we have his peasants quoting songs, dancing to the sound of the bagpipe, and Will Swan, the miller, desiring to perform what he calls the

Schamon's Dance, for the amusement of the multitude. This was probably a kind of hornpipe accompanied by action and song, and performed in character. The early and unhappy death of James was a loss which his country long deplored, and avenged with such singular ferocity, as made the author of the Muses' Threnodie exclaim,

A cruel crime, rewarded cruellie.

I come now to a part of my subject over which I would gladly pass,—which has employed the rich Gothic genius of Percy, and the dry barren criticism of Ritson,—on which the Welsh have doted and the Irish dreamed,—the history of our Minstrels and Bards. But I come to it as one who comes to a deep and a broad stream, over which there is no bridge, on which there is no boat, where there is no ford visible, through which he cannot wade, and dare not try to swim, yet over which he must pass before he can be in safety or in shelter. I must throw myself into the flood, and trust to fortune. An introduction to song would be incomplete without some notice of a race or order of men, frequently mentioned in history and tradition, who experienced the favour of kings, and tasted the severity of our laws; and whose genius and labours are supposed with truth to have materially influenced the character and augmented the fame and number of our lyrics. In seeking to separate conjecture from truth, and to distinguish between the dreams of national vanity and the more sober and rational conclusions of men whose fancy was kept in awe by the interposition of good sense and honest judgment,

I have no wish to strip from the minstrel the robes of Percy, and cover him with the rags of Ritson. To show him seated with kings, invested with collars of gold and singing the deeds of heroes, and then to divest him of his dignity, and class him with the idle and the base, brand him as a disturber of peace, and put him down as a fugitive and vagabond, is to draw no fictitious portrait: it is the common story of many communities and individuals, who abused the favour, and experienced the caprice, of princes. The painting of Percy is that of a poet, to whose eye was ever present the sweeping robes and jewelled dresses of the Gothic courts of romance, and who sometimes ascribed more than the world felt to the pathos and spirit of old song. But Ritson was more than the reverse, he doubted almost all that other men believed; he looked on the promised land of verse, and said, the water is naught and the ground barren. This fastidiousness, and querulous regard for accuracy, did far more harm than Percy's rich and fruitful imagination, which, like the first spell in the magician's book, made

> The cobweb on a dungeon wall
> Seem tapestry in lordly hall;
> A nutshell seem a gilded barge;
> A sheeling seem a palace large.

Whereas Ritson beheld all with the spell-bound look of the warder of Branksome, who, for the heir of Buccleuch and his mysterious guide, saw only

> A terrier and lurcher passing out.

But before I proceed to draw a farther parallel be-

tween the poet and the critic, as I am speaking of imaginary things, and periods of darkness and tradition, it may be as well to listen to the claims of the Bards of Ireland, who, with the Welsh, desire to take precedence in all that concerns our national music and song.

In the history of Irish poetry, the order of creation is reversed, the evening and morning come not according to natural order; light precedes darkness, and the dawn is brighter than the mid-day. In the traditions of all other nations, the farther back we go the darker our way becomes: with the bards of Ireland we may travel into the remotest times, and still our road grows broader and fairer; and the excellence of their poetry, the beauty of their persons, and their importance in the world, augment as we proceed. We are indebted to the research or to the fancy of Walker for much curious information respecting them; and if we may credit common belief, Ireland has been famous for song for a longer period than even national vanity seems willing to name. A thousand years might be safely taken from the duration of its poetic fame, and yet enough be left to soothe or please a very reasonable share of pride; and more than enough to stagger the belief of a very zealous antiquary. Instead of a herd of wild deer chased over a wilder heath by a troop of barefooted barbarians, and a rude song of triumph or of joy when the venison was preparing on the hearth-fire of a hovel of turf and heather, we are introduced to splendid palaces, to princes and poets in scarlet and in gold, to the thrill of a thousand musical instruments, and polite conten-

tions between mighty bards in civilized song. All this could never be.

To imagine a people famous beyond all nations in ancestry and song, with academies for instructing noble youths in this heaven-born art, with poets gifted with the threefold powers of bard, prophet, and priest, with kings eager to reward and peasants to admire, and where the sword of the hero and the hearts of princesses were alike under the control and keeping of poesy,—is only to realise to the imagination the court of Ollam Fodla, monarch of Ireland, in the year of the world 3236. I claim some indulgence from the ordinary reader for choosing an era of such modest pretensions to antiquity, when I might have carried him farther into the regions of Celtic romance by a thousand years, and still have presented him with Irish Poesy grown to full size, living with princes, founding academies and palaces, and revelling in epic song. When Ollam came to the throne, he summoned all his tributary kings and national bards, and after recording some salutary laws in the Psalter of Tara, or government chronicle, he proceeded to pass an act regarding the production of that scarce commodity called poetic genius. "He ordained that none but young men of genius and noble descent should be admitted into the order of bards; that the profession should be hereditary, and, when a bard died, his estate was to devolve not to his eldest son, but to such of his family as discovered the greatest talents for music and poetry." I have not heard what effect this law, which removed that ancient right of nature to con-

ceive and bring forth genius in her own capricious way, had upon song; and from the silence of history and tradition, I am inclined to believe that the glory of Irish verse was not at all increased by ordaining that none should sing but those of noble descent.

It is to be regretted that this great and literary prince and people have left us nothing to admire but an empty name: of all the poets cherished and rewarded, not one has descended in song to posterity. A great people without any visible monuments of greatness, and a literary nation without any traces of literature, present a riddle too profound for the solution of man. The temples of Greece,—a land strown with works of art, and every hill and vale living yet in living song,—give us an image of ancient greatness which illustrates history; but of all the splendid poetical academies of Ireland, where the bards studied nine years by torch-light, of all the songs they sang after this laborious apprenticeship, we have neither a stone standing nor a verse remaining. When I am told that the bards marched to battle with flowing robes and glittering harps, and stood apart, while the ranks closed, to single out acts of heroism to record in song, I can imagine a rude and uncultivated and martial people, who, like the Normans, advanced on their enemies amid warlike music and song; but when I am also told, that the women on a day of battle rushed in among their husbands and brothers, animating them with their war songs and the music of the cruit or harp, I forget that I am reading of a people who lay claim to superior civilization, and think of a

horde of martial barbarians, such as the Romans encountered in the naked Britons and painted Caledonians. It is in vain that the penury of this original people is sought to be hid in magnificent words: the rewards which their princes bestowed on their poets and historians speak of a nation of shepherds—of kings who had little to give, and of genius paid in kind. When the Welsh law restrained bards from begging the king's horse, hawk, or greyhound, we suppose those inspired people were a privileged race, and that it was a point of honour or of superstition to present them with what they desired; and it is not illiberal to imagine, that as the law extended no protection to the king's plate and coin, he had no coin or plate to protect from the need or the avarice of the poets. In like manner, when we find that a teller of thirty Irish tales was rewarded with a large cow, the relater of forty tales with three that gave milk, while he who repeated fifty stories obtained five cows, or a chariot, or rather a trail-car, according to the nature of his compositions, we have a very curious and instructive picture of a people semi-barbarous, who had nothing more valuable than their flocks; and whose palaces in the midst of woody deserts, instead of being embellished with sculptures, and filled with paintings and books, and vessels of silver and gold, were perhaps filled with milch cows, and other indications of pastoral wealth. Nor am I sure that by coming nearer our own times by a thousand years, we shall see any extraordinary influence which the numerous colleges and literary regulations of Ireland exercised over the intellect or the

visible wealth of the princes and people. In the reign of King Hugh, A. D. 580, the bards became extremely insolent and corrupt, and their order a national grievance. They demanded the golden buckle and pin which fastened the robes on the royal breast; had there been a crown to demand, they would have asked it too: they lampooned the chief nobility; and, confiding in their numbers, amounting to one third of the men of Ireland,—a curious calculation—set the monarch at defiance. By the assistance of St. Columba, who was summoned from Scotland, the chief poets were rebuked, their numbers lessened, and the subjects for their muse pointed out by the careful finger of church and state. To the glory of Heaven, the honour of Ireland, the fame of its heroes, and the beauty of its women, they were directed to confine their musings.—But all such laws have been imagined in vain; for of the poetry of that age, when one third of the men were poets, we have as little as we have of the days of the first Milesians, when Cir Mac Cis and Onna Ceanfinn presided over the poetry of the north and the music of the south, eighteen hundred years before the coming of Christ.

I shall not attempt to trace the fall of Irish poetry, since I cannot say how far it fell, nor describe the share which Christianity is said to have had in its decline; nor try to allot to the Danes and the English their several shares in the great wreck of national song. But I very willingly leave the pages of romance and conjecture, and accept the aid of an Englishman and poet, in estimating the character of the Irish bards and their productions.

It seems to fluctuate between the thief and the patriot, between inflated prose and genuine poesy. During the reign of Queen Elizabeth, Spenser lived long in Ireland, and observed the country and the bards with a poet's eye; he has left us a valuable and a lively picture of an order of men, whom national vanity seeks to conceal beneath the splendid draperies of fiction :—

"There is amongst the Irish a certain kind of people called bards, which are to them instead of poets, whose profession is to set forth the praises or dispraises of men in their poems or rhymes; the which are had in so high regard and estimation amongst them, that none dare displease them, for fear to run into reproach through their offence, and to be made infamous in the mouths of all men: for their verses are taken up with a general applause, and usually sung at all feasts and meetings by certain other persons, whose proper function that is, who also receive for the same great rewards and reputation amongst them. They are, for the most part, so far from instructing young men in moral discipline, that they themselves do more deserve to be sharply disciplined; for they seldom use to choose unto themselves the doings of good men for the arguments of their poems; but whomsoever they find to be most licentious of life, most bold and lawless in his doings, most dangerous and desperate in all parts of disobedience and rebellious disposition, him they set up and glorify in their rhymes; him they praise to the people, and to young men make an example to follow. For being, as they all be, brought up idly, without awe of parents, without precepts of

masters, and without fear of offence; not being directed or employed in any course of life which may carry them to virtue, will easily be drawn to follow such as any may set before them: for a young mind cannot rest; if he be not still busied in some goodness, he will find himself such business as shall soon busy all about him. In which, if he shall find any to praise him, and to give him encouragement, as those bards and rhymers do for little reward, or the share of a stolen cow, then waxeth he most insolent, and half mad with the love of himself and his own lewd deeds. And as for words to set forth such lewdness, it is not hard for them to give a goodly and painted show thereunto, borrowed even from the praises as are proper to virtue itself; as of a most notorious thief and wicked outlaw, which had lived all his lifetime on spoils and robberies, one of their bards in his praise will say, that he was none of the idle milk-sops that was brought up by the fireside, but that most of his days he spent in arms and valiant enterprizes; that he did never eat his meat before he had won it with his sword; that he lay not all night slugging in a cabin under his mantle, but used commonly to keep others waking to defend their lives; and did light his candle at the flames of their houses to lead him in the darkness; that the day was his night and the night his day; that he loved not to be long wooing of wenches to yield to him, but where he came he took by force the spoil of other men's love, and left but lamentation to their lovers; that his music was not the harp nor lays of love, but the cries of people and clashing of armour; and,

finally, that he died not bewailed of many, but made many wail when he died, that dearly bought his death.

"I have caused divers of these poems to be translated unto me, that I might understand them; and surely they savoured of sweet wit and good invention, but skilled not of the goodly ornaments of poetry; yet were they sprinkled with some pretty flowers of their natural device, which gave good grace and comelieness unto them; the which it is a great pity to see so abused to the gracing of wickedness and vice, which with good usage would serve to adorn and beautify virtue."

Let me add to this some of the song of the poet of the O'Neil's of Clanna-boy, and the picture of the bard's person and description of his feelings are complete. He sings of the woes of Ireland, and sings like an eloquent barbarian:—"Our miseries were predicted a long time, in the change these strangers wrought in the face of the country. They have hemmed in our sporting lawns, the former theatres of our glory and virtue. They have wounded the earth, and they have disfigured with towers and ramparts those fair fields which nature bestowed for the support of the animal creation. The slaves of Ireland no longer recognize their common mother; she equally disowns us for her children: we both have lost our forms. Hapless land! the plunderer hath refitted you for his habitation, and we are now moulded for his purposes." When this is sobered down into ordinary language, it is nothing but the lament of a man that his country is become cultivated and enclosed, that houses are erected and castles built, and that he has no longer liberty to

range in his boundless woods, and feed his flocks by the mountain and the river. This honest effusion is the best answer to those who see in the old and rude institutions of Ireland the perfect works of a civilized and enlightened people, with whom flourished for thousands of years agriculture, architecture, sculpture, chivalry, and song. For the honour which follows the name of those who sang for the delight and instruction of the wise and the noble, let us examine the story of the last representative of the ancient bards, Turlough O'Carolan. He wandered up and down scattering music and song wherever he went, among rich and poor: he gave joy to others, but had always poverty to himself; and I have not heard that any of those in whose honour he sang, and who loved to talk of the glory of the bards of old, and of the generosity of the princes and nobles, gave him either mantles or milch cows. He died in the 68th year of his age, in 1738, and was buried at Kilronan, in the diocese of Ardagh. "His grave," says Walker, "is still known to his few surviving friends, and the neighbouring hinds; and his skull is distinguished from other skulls scattered promiscuously about the churchyard, by a perforation in the forehead, through which a small piece of riband is drawn." This is fame!

But Ireland can urge many real claims to eminence in song, without referring to imaginary epics, visionary tales, and ancient times of poetic glory, to which the most dauntless fancy cannot fix a date. It suits my present purpose to notice, that the northern parts of the island possess many songs, conceived in the peculiar

humour and fancy of the people; which, with a strong infusion of the spirit of the nation, bear a close resemblance to the Lowland songs of Scotland. It is evident, they have more of the Saxon than the Celtic feeling in them: yet they express the character of the country with much liveliness and graphic accuracy. In this will-o'-wisp excursion among woods and wilds with the bards of the sister land, I had hope of finding so fair a picture of their ancient state, that I could have held it up as an image of the former condition of the Scottish and English minstrels. But Truth wrote on water, and Romance wrote on stone. I sought history, and I found fable. Let me return to my native country, and examine the state of the minstrels of the north and south; and endeavour to delineate their character and condition, from sources more sure and accurate than what are presented by the historians of Ireland.

When Percy, with a poet's affection and a scholar's diligence, gathered together the many and curious evidences of the fame of the minstrels and the popularity of their songs, he expected a close and critical examination perhaps, but he could have no idea that a critic of learning and research would follow his steps to misinterpret his authorities, and mock the character which he had so beautifully drawn of this ancient class of men. It is not easy to imagine a liberal reason for Ritson's hostility. It was not love of truth, for he has wilfully closed his eyes on some important historical facts, and opened them wide to misinterpret others. It was not love of our ancient poesy, for to vilify the

authors of some of our sweetest compositions is to traduce the art itself; but it seems to have arisen from the mingled spirit of contradiction and envy, and from a resolute wish of exhibiting the rude and ungainly side of a subject which Percy had shown so stately and engaging. Nor was this at all difficult to do. He could come to the contest armed with royal edicts, opinions of nobles, and notices of historians, in which the minstrel art was degraded to the level of buffoonery, and its professors classed with the worthless and the base. But while he brought all this array against the respectability of the calling, he could not be insensible that in a thousand places in story and song, in edicts and in history, the minstrel was classed with the brave and the honourable; that he sang before princes and nobles; that his rewards were large, and his immunities worthy of his art and of an opulent and liberal country. This difference seems easily accounted for. A gifted and popular professor of the art of minstrelsy was as far removed above the condition of one who harped and sang to the mere multitude, as the martial song of Marmion is above the common chant of a metre ballad-maker; as transcendant in dignity and eminence, as Siddons is superior to the Lady Macbeth of a strolling actress in a country barn, with blankets for curtains and rustics for an audience.

Nothing can be more elegant, or, perhaps, more accurate, than the character of the minstrels. It is Percy who speaks.—"They were an order of men in the middle ages who united the arts of poetry and music, and sang verses to the harp of their own composing; who appear

to have accompanied their songs with mimicry and action, and to have practised such various means of diverting as were much admired in those rude times, and supplied the want of more refined entertainments; whom these arts rendered extremely popular and acceptable in this and all the neighbouring countries, where no high scene of festivity was esteemed complete that was not set off with the exercise of their talents; and where, so long as the spirit of chivalry subsisted, they were protected and caressed, because their songs tended to do honour to the ruling passion of the times, and to encourage and foment a martial spirit." In support of this character many authorities are collected, which give altogether a curious specimen of the manners and feelings of those unruly and martial times.

In the reign of King John, Ranulph Earl of Chester, marching into Wales with a slender retinue, was attacked by the Welsh, and constrained to seek shelter in his castle of Rothelan, where he was instantly besieged. This happened during the great fair of Chester; and Roger de Lacey, the constable, hearing of the earl's distress, collected a multitude of minstrels and players, and other persons whom the festivities of the season had gathered, and putting his son-in-law, Ralph Dutton, at their head, hastened them onwards to Rothelan. The Welsh, mistaking them for an army of disciplined veterans, dispersed, and the siege was raised. For this good service, Ranulph granted to Dutton and his descendants a peculiar patronage over minstrels, players, and other merry companions; and it appears, that as late as the

14th of Henry the Seventh, Laurence Dutton, Lord of Dutton, claimed, that all minstrels inhabiting or exercising their office within the county and city of Chester should appear before him or his steward on the feast of St. John yearly, and give him at the said feast four flagons of wine and one lance; and that every minstrel should pay him fourpence-halfpenny. When Edward the First went to the Holy Land, he was accompanied by a harper or minstrel; and this person seems to have been an inmate of the prince's tent; for when Edward was wounded by the Saracen, the harper rushed in, and beat out the assassin's brains with a tripod. The notice of historians, and the song of Gray, will perpetuate Edward's ferocity to the bards of Wales, whose influence over a rude and a martial people was in the way of his ambition; yet in his own court the minstrels appear to have been distinguished by royal favour. When, in 1306, he conferred the honour of knighthood on his son and on many of the young nobility, a multitude of minstrels were introduced, to kindle, by their music and their songs, an enthusiasm among the newly made knights, to induce them to make some military vow. This unwonted kindness of Edward to the professors of minstrelsy boded no good to the liberties of Scotland. The vow which they inspired in the king was, that he would take ample vengeance on Robert Bruce, for insulting God, the church, and himself; and having done that duty, would sheathe his sword against Christians, hasten to Palestine, and fight as long as he lived against the heathen. I know not what the vow of the knights

was, but that of young Edward is recorded. He would put himself at the head of the army, and not remain two nights in one place till he reached Scotland. A curious passage in Stow proves that minstrels were, like heralds, a privileged race, and that they could pass at pleasure into the royal presence. In 1316, while Edward the Second solemnised the feast of Pentecost in the great Hall of Westminster, and sat with all his peers around him, there entered a woman adorned like a minstrel, sitting on a great horse, trapped as minstrels then used, who rode round the tables showing pastime, then laid a letter before the king, saluted the presence, and departed. The letter was a remonstrance with his majesty concerning the favours he conferred on minions.

When Henry the Fifth embarked for the French wars, in 1415, he ordered his minstrels, fifteen in number, to attend him, to each of whom he gave an allowance of twelvepence a day: a liberal salary in those times. Though he provided, by his valour and heroism, one of the finest themes for poesy of any of our kings, such was his modesty that he would not allow, on his return to London, the helmet which he were at Agincourt to be carried before him, for the people to see the dints and cuts which it had endured in the day of battle; nor would he allow any ditties to be made or sung by minstrels in honour of his victory, modestly ascribing the whole praise to God alone. But this did not proceed from any disregard for the professors of music and song; for next year at the feast of Pentecost, when the Emperor and the Duke of Holland were his guests, he or-

dered rich gowns for his minstrels, and to each of them he orally bequeathed one hundred shillings yearly, which his son caused to be paid out of the exchequer.

On a complaint made to Edward the Fourth, that various rude and incompetent persons had assumed the name and habit of the king's minstrels, and collected money in several parts of the kingdom, his majesty granted to Walter Haliday, marshal of his minstrels, and to seven of his brethren, a charter, which empowered them to examine the pretensions of all who affected to follow the minstrel profession, and to admit them to their rights and immunities, or to silence and punish them. Walter Haliday seems to have been a favourite minstrel during three reigns: I am willing to claim him as a minstrel of the "North Countrie," probably belonging to the ancient house of Haliday in Dumfriesshire. Alexander Carlyle, another of the minstrels, has also a name with a northern sound.

Such are the chief authorities on which Percy depends for support, in the history of minstrelsy and his character of its professors; and these seem so conclusive, as to place the fame and name of our old bards and musicians beyond the suspicions of criticism, and the cavils of antiquarians. To those, and they may be many, who are unwilling to bury themselves with Ritson among the rubbish of verse or history, I shall seek to express his doubts with clearness and brevity, and describe the means and manner by which he hoped to level with the ground the beautiful Gothic fabric raised, as the antiquarian imagined, by the enchantments of Percy.

The critic commences by permitting France and Spain to enjoy the reputation which history gives them of a race of minstrels who united the genius of the poet with the skill of the musician, and went from bower to hall, singing to the noble and the far-descended of valour and of beauty. This was too well authenticated to be rashly disputed, nor did it suit his purpose to doubt the continental character of the minstrel; but he denies to England the pleasure of ever having heard, in her native tongue, the union of poetry and music from the lips and hands of her minstrels. He tells how the Norman minstrel Taillefer fell at the battle of Hastings, singing the ballad of Rollo—because he sang in a foreign language; and he is willing to admit that Richard the First was discovered in his captivity by the courage and skill of his minstrel—since the song which Blondel sang, and to which the king responded, is composed in French. But he believes and endeavours to prove, that the minstrels who composed songs and sang them to music at the English court were all foreigners, and their compositions in their native tongue; and that the real minstrel of England was a mere musician, who never conceived a verse nor sang a song to the sound of either harp or lute. He laughs,—and one cannot well forbear smiling,—at the ludicrous military array of those minstrels who marched from Chester fair along with their impure comrades, whom I am content to name "merrie companions" with the modest historian, to the relief of Earl Ranulph: but this only proves that in the reign of King John they were a numerous class of men, and that the exercise of their art,

whether of poetry or music, or both, was productive, since so many lived by it. If they sang, their songs would be the common language of the country; those who wish to please must endeavour to be understood.

If the Chester minstrels have left it doubtful whether they sang to please the multitude, or merely limited the pleasure they wished to give to their instruments alone, there can be no doubt that the minstrels, who assembled by the order of Edward the First, both sang and played. Music without language was too refined an instrument for such a politician as Edward. It seems but an imperfect teller of purposes; and the music which moved his nobles and knights had more of a human tongue in it than any mere sounds of our own times, if they could distinguish whether it urged them to a Scottish or a French war. Ritson appears to have felt this; and though he is very curious and scrupulous about proofs both in verse and prose when other men seek to establish any conclusive point, yet he is willing to be satisfied with mere assertion in aid of himself, when he declares that the existence of music and song by no means proves the minstrels to have been Englishmen. Now though it be true, that many national songs of this period were written in French, it is also true, that many were composed in the national language: the songs of Robin Hood were popular at this period, so were ballads in honour of Ranulph, the gallant Earl of Chester; and the disastrous wars between Scotland and England were the cause of songs on both sides of the Tweed, in the common speech of the country. We

know that the English language, about this period, acquired a harmony and a vigour fit for any purpose of heroic song. We know that it was widely spoken and commonly written, that it was the language of the nobles and the people, for foreign speech was confined to a few; and why should we conclude that the youths of England were moved on to an heroic enterprise in other language than their own? We are told, indeed, that Edward the Second took a carmelite friar with him, to sing of his exploits in Scotland; and that he paid a poet's ransom, by singing a Latin song in honour of the hero of Bannockburn. But though his song, such as it is, is written in Latin, it is only a proof of the taste of the friar; his was the failing of a far finer and later genius, George Buchanan; a failing common to many learned men, and by no means a proof that ladies' charm and knights' exploits were commonly commended in Latin. Were the minstrels of Henry the Fifth, Walter Haliday and Alexander Carlyle, foreigners? I am speaking of an age to which the genius of Chaucer and Barbour may be said to belong; and surely the language which they wrote is worthy of being measured out to any music that ever came from harp or lute. It has softness and grace equal to the expression of the most tender sentiments; and strength and nobleness equal to the description of the most adventurous and heroic deeds.

For the same purpose, and with the same wish to prove that no English minstrel ever united the arts of poetry and music, and sang verses to the harp of his own composing, Ritson descends step by step through va-

rious reigns to the days of Elizabeth; examining old chronicles, and scarce tracts, and obscure verses, with the most painful and inquisitive diligence. He collects many remarkable passages, where minstrels are described as mere musicians, and classed with the idle and the dissolute; but he abstains from touching on those authorities, and they are many, which through a long lapse of years give the minstrels song as well as melody. With the reign of Elizabeth, the glory or the shame of the minstrels terminates: their friends and their enemies alike agree that they are become unworthy of further notice, and have wholly fallen from that station which the chief professors of the art maintained in the courts of kings, and the castles of nobles, through a succession of centuries. The glossarists explain minstrels to mean musicians, but they explain it from the visible symbol of the profession, the instrument which they carried to assist them in song. Men would call the old poet so beautifully described in the introductory lines of "The Lay of the last Minstrel" a harper, since a harp is carried at his side; but the moment he commences the song which

> Was not framed for village churls,

he becomes a minstrel to the ear as well as to the eye, and a poet too; in spite of Sir Henry Spelman, and all other people who understood the direct but not the figurative meaning.

But no point which the ungenerous industry or the perverse pride of learning ever sought to establish has

been so completely demolished as this. Authorities, learned and unlearned, men who speak in the language of the country, and those who speak in that of a foreign land: the monk in his cell,—the poet in his song, the historian in his history, have been summoned from the dust of museums, and the dwelling-places of moths, to confound Ritson and all his imaginings. That minstrel means both bard and musician, no one may longer doubt; but it must be confessed the name of poet cannot, without outraging all charitable belief, extend itself over the unsummable multitudes, who wandered harp in hand about the country wearing the minstrel's cloak, and contributing to the amusement of the rabble. Some of the authorities are rare and entertaining. In the romance of Emraré, which from its obsolete style, nakedness of story, and poverty of incident, Percy supposes to rank next in age to Hornchild, we have—

I have heard minstrels sing yn sawe;

and in a poem by Adam Davie, author of some metrical visions as old as Edward the Second, we find this distich—

Merry it is in hall to hear the harp,
The minstrels sing, the jogelours carpe.

So also William of Nassyngton, who wrote soon after, says—

I will make no vain carping
Of deeds of arms, nor of amours,
As does minstrels and gestours;

That makes carping in many a place
Of Octaviene and Isumbrasse.

That the minstrels were singers as well as musicians these quotations sufficiently prove; and that they composed verses which they chanted or sang to the harp, there are proofs in abundance. In the romance of Emraré we find the following exhortation:—

Minstrels that walken fer and wide,
Here and there on every side,
In mony a diverse londe;
Should at her beginning
Speak of that righteous king
That made both sea and land.

In the ancient song of Guy and Colbrande, the minstrel speaks more openly:—

When meat and drink in great plentye,
Then lords and ladies still will be,
And sit and solace lythe;
Then it is time for me to speak
Of keen knights and kempes great,
Such carping for to kythe.

And Hollinshed, translating the prohibition of Henry the Fifth to his minstrels, on his return from Agincourt, that they should abstain from composing songs in honour of his success, says clearly that he would not permit any ditties to be made and sung by minstrels on his glorious victory: and we have proof enough that most of his min-

strels were Englishmen. It seems to me that Percy in the number of his authorities either overlooked or disregarded one of the most respectable and conclusive, inasmuch as it gives evidence of the music, of the song, and of the language. In the prologue to the Canterbury Tales, written about the year 1388, Chaucer confers all the attributes of a minstrel on his friar. I know not whether I am more pleased with the singular testimony which the passage yields to the description of Percy, or the happy and vigorous language of the father of English poesie.

His tippet was ay farsed ful of knives,
And pinnes for to given faire wives;
And certainly he had a merry note,
Wel could he singe and plaien on a rote;
Of yeddinges he bare utterly the pris.
His nekke was white as is the fleur-de-lis.
But he was like a maister or a pope,
Of double worsted was his semicope,
That round was as a belle out of the presse.
Somewhat he lisped, for his wantonesse
To make his English sweet upon his tongue;
And in his harping when that he hadde songe,
His eyen twinkled in his hed aright,
As donne the starres in a frosty night.

It is now time, and more than time, to leave the minstrels and bards of our sister lands in the obscurity into which the variable taste of mankind, and the universal diffusion of literature, by the pen and by the press,

had thrown them and their art; and inquire into the character and productions of those who belonged to Scotland. But in writing the story of the southern minstrelsy, we are telling the tale of the northern. It is the offspring of the same people, of the same taste, of the same feelings, of the same hardihood in martial adventures, with the like love for the strange and the superhuman. Our minstrels, like their brethren of the south, frequented the courts of our princes, the castles of our nobles, and the bowers of our ladies. They sang the same themes of valour and of beauty, of true history and wild romance, of domestic calamities, or of national welfare. They experienced, too, the same vicissitudes of fortune—pleased the ear of the princes and the pride of the people at one time: or suffered by their neglect, by their caprice, and by the cruelty of their edicts at another.

No longer courted and caressed,
High placed in hall a welcome guest,
He poured to lord and lady gay
The unpremeditated lay.
A wandering harper scorned and poor,
He begged his bread from door to door;
And tuned, to please a peasant's ear,
The harp a king had loved to hear.

A Stewart, a Douglas, a Seton, or a Gordon, listened to the minstrel and his song with as fond an ear, and rewarded him with as liberal a hand, as a Plantagenet, a Percy, or a Howard. But he found the hand that was ready to give was as prompt to punish; and the oral

poets and historians of the land had to bewail, in the north as well as in the south, the rigorous justice or the hasty cruelty of their princes and nobles: nor was this to be wondered at, for the honour or dishonour of nobility and knighthood seemed so much at the mercy of an order of men, who had all the fierce passions common to genius, and who perhaps were sometimes more willing to signalize unpopular themes than pour out their songs according to the measure of their patrons' wishes, or the politics of the court. Or we may consider them desirous of rewarding in song the valour which protected their country, or the beauty which adorned it. But the poet who sang of the bravery of a Black Douglas would hurt the vanity of the Red; he who soothed the pride of a Scott would find a Kerr an ungrateful listener; what made a Home smile might make a Hamilton frown, and the verse which might extract a largesse from the hand of a Maxwell would bring the author a speedy blow from that of a Johnstone. The pride of one clan was in arms against the pride of another: district was jealous of the fame of district, and town of the reputation of town; while he who sang a partial or a party strain was sacrificed as animosities rose or subsided.

There were themes, nevertheless, for which the minstrels could ever find willing listeners: a military inroad upon England, or a romance steeped deep in the streams of ancient belief and popular superstition. The charms of a moonlight raid could only be equalled by those of an equestrian procession of the spiritual people with whom belief had tenanted vale and hill; and the clang

of the trumpet or the horn that summoned to battle was rivalled by the sound of the elfin-pipe, and the melody of the fairy minstrelsy. The storming of a rich town gave way to the description of the palace of fairyland; and the prospect of much booty, to that of seizing a charmed ring or an enchanted sword. A castle where warders paced, and where archers stood with their bows bent, was a less pleasant sight to a martial people than the palaces of polished steel, or the walls of burnished brass, which the wizard's skill promised of old for the glory of Scotland. A Wallace quelling a Red Reaver, or a Bruce slaying a Bohun, filled the minds of an imaginative people much less than the story of the Hero and the Spirit of Gaskhall; which I confess I never read while a boy without a shudder: or the tale of Michael Scott and his infernal steed, with its hoof lifted for the third stamp which was to sink Paris. If it were the pleasures of midnight booty, which charged the shield of one of our most illustrious families with the moon and stars; it was the influence of a romantic imagination, which added the savage warder and the mermaid for supporters. If the hand and dagger, and the bold "I dare," of the name of Kirkpatrick belong to the page of history, it was a mixed love of poetry and danger which added wings to the spur of the Johnstones.

Yet martial as the songs of the minstrels were, I am not prepared to say that they were conceived on the field of battle, and that, like the poets of the Normans, they chanted warlike songs as they rushed to the attack; or with a mixture of poetic fury and military glee marched

with harp and sword to death or glory, like the bards of the ancient Irish. Froissart, who has left us such a vivid picture of the army with which Randolph and Douglas foiled young King Edward at Stanhope Park, has nowhere alluded to any sounds more harmonious than the clamour of horns, and the shouting of the names of leaders. He was too much of a poet, too fond of the picturesque, and far too anxious and accurate an inquirer, to have left the poet and his art unnoticed, had a minstrel been in the camp. The dress of the minstrel, and the instrument with which he was encumbered, seem unfit for a rapid march, and all the changes of fortune pertaining to the military life. He who sang of valour might have failed in personating a hero; and the most inspired strain of poesy could not well augment the fury or the animosity with which nation at that time regarded nation. It was in a scene where the helmet and cuirass were laid aside for the velvet dress of peace, where princes sued and ladies presided, that the minstrel, with his harp and song, was to be found. When he was away from the ranks of war, he was to be sought as a minister of pleasure in such a court as that of James, on which Douglas refused to smile, and to which Lady Heron sang.

It is not necessary that I should seek for the period when the minstrelsy of Scotland was most famous, or to what source their romantic legends are to be ascribed. He who reads the introduction to the romance of Sir Tristram will find more curious learning illustrating the subject than would gratify the most avaricious an-

tiquary, and genius and skill enough to satisfy the greatest unbeliever in the northern antiquity of the oral art. I think the Scottish origin of the earliest British romance, composed in the native tongue, is sufficiently clear; and also the superiority of the language in which it is written over the first specimens that we have of the labours of the English muse: but I am not quite so satisfied of the Celtic origin of the romances which were showered so thickly over Scotland; though they have certainly caught a colouring from the traditions and beliefs of the original inhabitants. I may aptly enough compare them with the language of the land—the mixed offspring of the speech of various tribes and nations, but amid which the Gothic prevails; and which, like a river augmenting its waters with many lesser streams, gives an impress and character to the whole. If our romance, like a curious piece of cabinet-work, was inlaid with Celtic or Scandinavian materials, the groundwork was undoubtedly Saxon. All that gave strength and durability arose from the people whose numbers and whose language prevailed. The labour of the inquiry would be certain, and the reward unsure, if some more extensive research were made to ascertain if the Arabian or Moorish lore had any influence, through the crusades, upon the northern romances and superstitious beliefs. Limited as my own knowledge is, and the learning of all other nations lying to me in utter darkness, since I am acquainted with no other language than my own, I have often imagined, as I read the history of the Arabians, and had their manners, and customs, and love

of poetry, and romantic adventure, laid by the historian or the traveller before me, that in return for the valour and the folly which Europe formerly sent against them, they had exported some of their wild fictions, and their passion for the extravagant and the strange. Our northern warriors were not fonder of the sword-blades of Damascus than they were of the wild fictions with which eastern story abounds; and if the sight of the more perfect structures of the East for beauty or defence had some influence on the castles and towers of those crusaders who had the good fortune to return, may we not imagine that the romantic song of the north also profited by an infusion from its literature, though it had to be translated to be understood? Yet, after all, it is beyond doubt that the acts, true or fabulous, of the ancient people of the land, and the names of the British worthies, have given subjects to romantic poets over Europe; and that elaborate fiction has, while it preserved, almost overlaid the name of Arthur and his renowned companions. But the manner in which those fictions are told, the superstitions they involve, and the feelings they consecrate, evince more of Saxon than of Celtic character; and I contemplate them as Gothic stories, in spite of Celtic names of places and heroes.

The choice which Thomas of Erceldoune made was a Celtic subject—the language in which it is written is that of England. The period of the composition of his poem may be fixed, according as the reader's fancy chooses to please youth, or indulge age, in the luxury of

bards of a vanquished and turbulent people, whose productions probably reminded them too often of their ancient independence, and who sang the achievements against the Saxon and the law of some of the more ferocious and desperate chieftains. Dr. Burney says the first Greek musicians were gods, the second heroes, the third bards, and the fourth beggars: it would be imprudent and unjust to claim celestial honours for our Caledonian bards; to the third and fourth honours of the Athenian scale we may safely aspire; and I gladly leave the Irish and the Welsh to divide the more lofty and less attainable honours between them.

When Gelimer, the vanquished King of the Vandals, implored from the clemency of his Roman conqueror a lyre, a spunge, and a loaf of bread, he is supposed to have asked a boon which he thought necessary for his pleasure, his comfort, and his existence. It was long since the monarch of Africa had tasted bread; a defluxion had fallen on his eyes, the effect of fatigue or incessant weeping; and he wished to solace the melancholy hours, by singing to the lyre the sad story of his own misfortunes. When Venantius Fortunatus assigns the lyre to the polished Romans, he resigns the harp to the hands of the barbarians; and the request of Gelimer would have been more national had he desired a harp instead of a lyre. But whatever instrument he asked for, the inference must be the same, that in seeking to unite music and poetry he sought a solace common to his nation; and in becoming the minstrel of his own misfortunes he gives an example to his Gothic descendants,

and bids us read the character of our ancestors in his affecting and singular story. The Welsh, the Irish, and the northern Scots, have all in their turns, though the children of another people, sung to the harp the story of their own misfortunes; and have sent from their woods, their mountains, and their morasses, a long and continued note of sorrow for their lost independence, the decay of their language, and the gradual disappearance from among the nations of their fame and their name. Their language has yielded, because the genius which supported it was unequal to the task of making it popular in literature; and as all their monuments of greatness were oral, their traces must in time disappear from the earth, —like the actor, who can leave no image of his genius behind.

When the earlier English poetry of Scotland was committed to the memories of the people, the pen had not been taught to come to the aid of the muse; its office was of a more holy, though not less poetical, nature; and in recording the legends and miracles of saints, and in tracing history hardly less fabulous, it was less worthily employed than in preserving the labours of an art which many of the pious deemed profane. If the church accounted minstrelsy heathenish, the laity would feel it expensive, if the swarms of its professors obtained from the generosity of the people food and raiment, such as was the reward of Henry the minstrel. It is not often indeed that minstrels are named in Scottish story, and they are not always mentioned with that respect which men ought to obtain who aspire to inspiration. Yet to

them we must ascribe the early reputation which our country obtained for romantic poetry, the multitude of wild and singular traditional stories for which our border counties have been long famous, and that impress and stamp of chivalry which distinguish much of our lyric poetry. To this I may add, that they lived in a land from which romantic fiction sprang, where the chief heroes were born, and disciplined to arms and courtesy. Ettricke Forest was the wood beloved by Merlin, and he is buried at Drumelyier on Tweed, in the territories of Urien and Ywain. Galloway was the patrimony of Gawain, and the reputed scene of the adventures of Sir Grime and Sir Gray Steil. At Stowe, in the vale of Gala, near Melrose, we are assured by the historian that Arthur deposited a piece of the true cross; and tradition still points out the tomb of the beautiful Gunever, between Cupar and Forfar. Carlisle, at that period included in the kingdom or dependencies of Scotland, was the Carduel of romance, the favourite residence of Arthur; and between that city and Penrith is his "Round table," which, like his romantic "Seat," still preserves his memory. A thousand lesser traditions, conceived in the same curious spirit with the romances of the minstrels, might be mentioned as the local offspring of this genial soil; all combining to prove how long the impulse of poetic creation lasted and lingered, with all its attendant beliefs and superstitions, among the valleys and secluded houses of the border. I might quote a thousand authorities from verse and history, to prove the pre-eminence in ballad and

song of the minstrels of the "north countrie;" but I choose rather to establish this by the excellence of the collection which I wish to make than to claim honour for what may have perished, or suffered that change which all oral poetry has endured.

The "Rich Stronde," on which Marinell was thrown by Britomart, was not more thickly bestrewed

With pearls and precious stones of great assay,

than names, and lines, and fragments, of our ancient song, may be seen floating on the early waves of the tide of Scottish literature. From the day when Gawain Douglas wrote, till the time that Allan Ramsay collected, we find in many a strange and unexpected place the impression which the popular songs of Scotland made on the various spirits which the change, and faction, and civil animosities of those eventful times brought into action and popularity. The legends of the church had, for a while, begun to sink under the flood of coarse sarcasm, or ironical satire, which the poets, with Sir David Lindsay at their head, poured upon it; and the saints, or gods of stone or silver, forsook their niches for the hammer or the crucible of the Reformers, who despised and destroyed those gross and sensible symbols of the sinking religion. The awakened spirit of the land went abroad, and as the old religion had invested itself with all the outward signs and tokens of earthly power and splendour, the new and purer worship perhaps despised too much the association of the simple and comprehensible doctrine of Christ with the grandeur

of Gothic architecture, the imposing magnificence of dress; and, above all, the effective aid of devout instrumental music, which seizes so powerfully on the minds of an imaginative people. The ministers of the declining church had been long degenerating from that pure and lofty race of beings, whose stirring genius and active virtues gave life and renown to the churches of Asia and Europe. They slumbered in luxurious indolence, or sensual pleasure; and when the world began to emerge from the darkness of ignorance, they alone endeavoured to retard its rise, or sought to extinguish the day-dawn of liberty, learning, and useful knowledge. They had long fostered the ignorance and encouraged the pastimes of the vulgar; sanctioned profane representations of sacred plays, tolerated the personations of the divinest characters, and allowed and encouraged men to make familiar with the most awful symbols of heavenly joys, or everlasting punishment. In promoting this desire for shows, and plays, and pageants, half holy, half heathenish, they introduced the multitude to the secrets of monkish imposture, and taught them unwittingly to smile at their own legends; to doubt the influence of their saints of wood and stone, the efficacy of their relics, and to laugh outright at all prayers addressed elsewhere than to the God of the universe. With the decline or fall of the ancient church, I apprehend the fictions of romance fell into discredit also; and in Scotland, at least, the Reformation had the effect of quenching the flame of poetry, and of turning the genius which nature wished to consecrate to the muse to more popular or more lucrative

purposes. The genius of poesy, in the Gothic days of the church, delighted in gorgeous and splendid things; in processions of sacred persons, in deeds of chivalry, in actions which hovered on the limits of probability, and in the magnificent scenes of courts and camps, where all was addressed to the eye or to the ear. But the poetic genius which followed was of a more simple and severe character. The lyric muse assumed a meek and an austere look, sang only of holy or edifying things, and walked abroad with a sedate step, "with leaden eyes that love the ground," and without the licentious accompaniment of music.

To endeavour to ascertain how much of our popular lyric poetry has survived the Reformation would be a fruitless effort of patriotism; for all at that period, and long after, was floating in the wide sea of oral remembrance, and Allan Ramsay was the first who made a successful attempt to snatch a portion from oblivion. The multitude of names, and fragments of forgotten songs, which are scattered about the humorous poems of our two royal James's, in the exquisite introductions to the books of the Eneid by Gawain Douglas, and in those strange and singular productions, Cockelbey's Sow, and the Complaynt of Scotland, may well excite our sympathy for the lost favourites of our forefathers. But it may serve to lessen our regret to know that some of those songs were unusually licentious and indelicate. It has been my good or my bad fortune to retrieve several of those regretted worthies; and it has cost me a labour equal to original composition to recall

them back to something like modesty and discretion. I am not sure that I shall act prudently in pointing them out; the antiquary will regret the change of what is old into what is new, and the nice and the inquisitive will regard them with a suspicious eye, and imagine that under the outward garb of decency and decorum the evil spirit still remains—that I have not wholly succeeded in evoking the fiend of licentiousness.

Few songs of the days of the minstrels have perhaps reached us, none probably in the language and form of the time. Songs which descend from generation to generation are changed or amended according to the taste or caprice of the multitude, at whose mercy all oral things lie; and nothing seems so mutable as lyric poetry. During the long period when memory performed the functions of the press, many songs must have appeared, and made an impression on the public mind, till others more beautiful, or possessing more popular qualities, came, and consigned their predecessors to silence and to oblivion. There are instances where songs breathing a kindred sentiment, and expressing with more elegance and more point the same story of some of our elder lyrics, have succeeded in supplanting them in popular esteem, and in expelling them from our collections. Burns, who, of all poets that ever breathed, possessed the most happy tact of pouring his genius through all the meanderings of music, was unrivalled in the skill of brooding over the ruder conceptions of our old poets, and in warming them into grace and life. He could glide like dew into the fading bloom of departing song, and refresh it into beauty

and fragrance. To this rare and enviable skill we owe the renovation of many songs; and this was a talent which he possessed in common with many of the nameless bards of Caledonia. It was an usual practice to ingraft verses upon our ballads and songs, and censure or applause was added or withdrawn from the heroes of the story, according to the caprice or the attachments of those dispensers of fame, military and domestic. The song which praised the valour of a Douglas was, by the tongue of some Northumbrian songster, made to honour the name of Percy; and the ballad of Chevy Chace, in the lips of an Englishman or Scotsman, ascribed the honour of the victory to that side of the Tweed on which the person who sang it stood. A person once made it his boast, in my hearing, that he could sing Johnnie Cope with its nine variations.

But it is not from the pages of our poets and historians alone that we are made sensible of the loss of many ancient songs. To those who are well acquainted among the lowland cottages it need not be told, that an evening's converse can scarcely go by without some remnant of ancient song being quoted, or some allusion made to others which had been heard in youth, and had failed to reach old age. I have collected many curious scraps in this way, and learned many quaint saws and proverbial sayings which have eluded Ramsay and Kelly. A vigilant and a skilful collector—one who would enter into the peculiar feelings of a shrewd and a suspicious people, might find his reward in many curious and instructive things which still linger among our hills and vales. In

all the songs which are composed by the peasantry—I mean by people unpractised in the arts of poetical composition—and in most of those which have descended from the oral times, there is a visible laxity in the rhymes; no regard has been paid to the pleasure which the eye feels in surveying a succession of couplets with an exact correspondence of rhyme, and the fastidious nicety of Spenser is a thing unknown in northern verse. The rhymes of the more simple days of our ancestors never came before the eye, and any little irregularity of this kind was surmounted and melted into harmony by a skilful voice. From this defect to the eye, it has been imagined that a song might be composed without the fetters of rhyme; but the ear demands a similarity of sound, and in the rudest of our lyrical compositions this has not been forgotten; nor am I sure, if it were unnecessary, that a singer accustomed to expect the recurrence of equality of sound could dispense with what I call an useful beauty. It was not till printing brought poetry before the popular eye, as well as ear, that the nice delicacy of rhyme was regarded; and though we have gained something to the sight, we have won nothing for the other sense.

On the very threshold of the Reformation, when the hands of the reforming multitude were lifted to knock at our abbey doors, to demand a purer and more simple mode of worship, some of our most exquisite songs were heard among us for the first time; and the musical voice of Alexander Scot entered less into the national spirit of song than did that of our gifted and unfortunate James

the Fifth. It was perhaps unfortunate for Scot, that his songs were all committed to the custody of paper, and more so that the unhappy times in which he wrote prevented his productions from laying hold of the public mind to the extent they deserved. Had they been thrown among the multitude, like the earlier lyrics, they would have been softened in their progress, and their uncouth or obsolete words replaced with others more current and melodious. But print or writing has an external air of authority and truth, with which the provincial bards might feel unwilling to meddle, and any changes of the text would be restored by reference to the original work. With an oral song they felt no such scruples; it came without the sanction of printed authority, and every one attired the orphan in the dress which pleased his fancy. The songs which are ascribed to King James are remarkable for their sprightly gaiety, and seem stamped off by the same hand which gave us that admirable historic painting of rustic life, Christ's Kirk on the Green. No other poet has ever been named as a sharer in the fame which these native productions have brought to Scottish royalty; and though the poem has been awarded by some good judges to his ancestor, James the First, I think, in comparison with its prototype, Peblis to the Play, it seems the work of a later age. The latter struck the very note in which the Muse of mirth and humour, from James Stuart to Robert Burns, has continued to sing; and, as a work presenting the first comic delineation of rustic life and manners, it is invaluable. But in buoyant ease and animation it is

far excelled by the Christ's Kirk, a poem which, for graphic power, is perhaps yet unequalled. There is such a rapid felicity of expression, such matchless drollery, and uncontrollable humour, that to resist laughing outright is positive pain. The keeping, and truth, and variety of the characters, are all in the most natural style; and the words, like those which overflowed on the Muse of Burns, come rattling in their ranks—dropping into their proper places, the work of good fortune rather than of study. The royal author was the poet of the commons as well as their king; and to him and his illustrious ancestor we owe those strains of homely and heart-felt mirth, which have continued to flow through Ramsay, and Ferguson, and Burns.

I know not if this incomparable performance was current among the people, to whose tastes and feelings it is peculiarly addressed: long poems won their way slowly into common favour, at a time when the press had not added wings to the works of genius. But I remember purchasing it for a penny, with the spirited continuation of Allan Ramsay; and I lament that all those little cheap copies of our favourite works have vanished before the influence of a more fleeting literature. The disgraceful discomfiture at Solway-moss, which hastened the death of the accomplished author, was avenged by many satiric ballads and songs, which imputed corruption to the commanders, and held them up as objects of public hatred and detestation. We have an account of the pain which those compositions gave to the Earl of Glencairn, one of the Scottish leaders: none of them are

known to exist; they fulfilled the wishes of their authors, and then sank into oblivion, like all verses emanating from temporary topics, which have no claim on the ordinary feelings of the human heart. The Earl of Glencairn was himself a poet, and one of the most zealous of the reformers: he wrote some verses, called "The Hermit of Loretto," which were popular in days when men opened their lips, for the first time, in safety against the tenets of the ancient church. He sings a true story —of an holy enthusiast and a common cheat, who erected a shrine at Loretto in honour of the Virgin Mary, and set up his own daughter as an image of the mother of Christ. The young woman was of incomparable beauty, and her charms, which were freely displayed to the opulent pilgrims, attracted such crowds of suppliants, that the shrine became rich, and the priest renowned. Such was the subject on which Alexander Cunningham wrote, and it seems that the earl's rhyme excited no common surprise in John Knox—his wonder almost makes the labour of one, in whom the Presbyterian apostle saw none of the gifts and graces of learning, amount to a miracle.

I have already mentioned the Complaynt of Scotland, and the notice which it took of our ancient lyrics: the poem—for I cannot deny the name of poem to a work that is strictly poetical in matter, though not in manner—deserves very particular notice, inasmuch as it is one of our earliest specimens of pastoral taste and feeling, and gives us the names of many curious romances, now only known by their torn and bleeding members

scattered up and down, or by the fame which they have left behind them. In the sixth chapter of a work which extends to twenty, the author passed from his study to the green fields, to feel the freshness of the dewy grass, and the odour of the flowers. What he saw is best told in his own words: some passages are omitted, and the orthography is regulated by the present mode of spelling. "I beheld many hooded shepherds blowing their buck-horns and their corn-pipes, calling and convoying many fat flocks to be fed on the fields; then the shepherds put their sheep on banks and braes, and on dry hills, to get their pasture. Then I beheld the shepherds' wives and children, that brought their morning breakfast to the shepherds. Then, after their disjune, they began to talk of great merriness, that was right pleasant to be heard. The principal shepherd made an orison to all the rest of his companions." This orison is in praise of a pastoral life, and on the wonders of the heavens, the thunder, the lightning, and the rain. His wife "admonishes" him, as all wives will: "My well-beloved husband, I pray thee to desist from that tedious melancholy orison which surpasses thy genius, for it is not thy faculty to dispute on a profound matter which thy capacity cannot comprehend. Therefore, I think it best to recreate ourselves with joyous communing. And to begin such recreation, I think it best that every one of us tell a good tale or fable, to pass the time till evening." All the shepherds, with their wives and servants, were glad of this proposition; then the oldest shepherd began, and all the rest followed, in their several places.

The names of the stories and tales which the author heard are very curious; the stock of romantic productions, of a Gothic or classic origin, which our forefathers had to gladden the winter nights, was far from inconsiderable; some of them are still known and popular, for when will Chaucer and Barbour cease to be known? but the greater proportion have excited all the pleasure they will ever excite, and the critic may ponder over their names, and the poet imagine the nature of the strain, for memory has long abandoned them to fancy. "The tale of the Wolf of the World's End." "The tale of Ferrand, Earl of Flanders, who wedded the Devil." "The tale of the Red Giant with three Heads." "The tale of the Giants who ate living Men." "The tale of the three-footed Dog of Noroway." "The tale of the Four Sons of Aymon." "The tale of the Brig of the Mantribil." "Lancelot de Lac."

Arthur Knight, he rode one night
With gilded spur, and candle light.

"The tale of Floremond of Albany, who slew the Dragon by the Sea." "The tale of Sir Walter the bold Leslie." "The bold Braband," and "The tale of the Three Weird Sisters." Of all these tales, and many others, not one line is left. What a rich treat of romantic adventure, and Gothic magnificence and superstition, many of them promise! I have some suspicion that the tale of the Wolf of the World's End is a misprint for the Well of the World's End—a nursery tale it is true, but one of great beauty. The three-footed Dog of Norway, and

the Three Weird Sisters, have a wild and unworldly sound; and Sir Walter, the bold Leslie, may be the same who,

Between the Less-lea and the mair,

performed an exploit still remembered in tradition.

"When the shepherds had told all their pleasant stories, then they and their wives began to sing sweet melodious songs of natural music of the antiquite; the four mermaidens, who sang when Thetis was married on Mount Pelion, sang not so sweet as did those shepherds, who excelled them all in melodious music. The musician, who sang so dulcetly till the stones moved, and the sheep, and cattle, and fowls of the air, lifted their voices to sing with him; yet nevertheless his harmonious song surpassed not the sweet songs of the foresaid shepherds. Now will I rehearse some of the songs which I heard among them."

The lyrics which these rustics sang in this waking dream of Wedderburn or Inglis (for we are not sure to whose fancy we owe it) are supposed to have been popular in 1549, when the poem was published. We may conclude, at least, that they were favourites of the author; and we cannot well help surmising, that as they are mentioned in a work of fiction rather than history, some of them may be the invention of the poet. This remark will extend to those names of songs interwoven in the poems of the James's, and in Gawain Douglas; and as such references give an air of truth and reality to a work of imagination, I see no reason why we should

not ascribe the invention to those poets, since we know it has been liberally used in later days. What serves to strengthen this supposition is, that we look in vain through this curious catalogue for our romantic or military ballads: with the single exception of those which relate to "The Hunt of Cheviot," we have no notice of ballads and songs, which were certainly popular at that period; and this may be ascribed to two reasons: either that many of the songs noticed were the creation of the author, or that his taste directed him more to the choice of those which were coloured with classic lore, and were swelled with the names of Nymphs and Fauns, and Pan and Apollo, and the "Muses nine." It seems indeed probable, from the strong infusion of classic reference and story into his list of tales, and the other parts of his work, that he laughed at the rude but graphic strains of our native lyrics, and refused to be moved with the multitude at the chanting of Johnie Armstrong, or the Tale of True Thomas. It must be confessed, however, that many of those songs commence with lines of a very natural and simple sound; and we cannot suppose that lyrics beginning with "Still under the leaves green," "Cou thou me the rashes green," "Broom, broom on hill," "Turn thy sweet will to me," "My love's lying ill, send him joy, send him joy," could readily deviate into a less natural strain than that with which they started. If the author was too prone to—

> Lay his lugs in Pindus' spring,
> And invocate Apollo,

he sinned in common with many better and more original spirits.

In seeking to choose a song to express the character of our lyrics at this period, I am desirous of selecting "The Lusty May;" because it unites classical allusion with natural emotion, and is either a specimen of Wedderburn's taste, or a proof of his genius for such compositions, since it has much of his pastoral and descriptive spirit, and may be his own.

THE LUSTIE MAYE.

O lustie Maye, with Flora queen,
The balmy drops, from Phœbus sheen,
Prelucent beam before the day;
By thee Diana groweth green,
Through gladness of this lustie Maye.

Then Aurora, that is so bright
To woeful hearts, she casts great light,
Right pleasantly, before the day,
And shows and sheds forth of that light,
Through gladness of this lustie Maye.

Birds on their boughs, when buds have birth,
Send forth their notes, and make great mirth,
On banks that bloom, on every brae;
And fare and flee o'er fauld and firth,
Through gladness of this lustie Maye.

And lovers all that are in care,
To their ladies they do repair,

In fresh mornings before the day;
And are in mirth, ay mair and mair,
Through gladness of this lustie Maye.

Of all the sweet months of the year,
To mirthful Maye there is no peer,
Her glistering garments are so gay.
You lovers all make merry cheer,
Through gladness of this lustie Maye.

The spirit of love and chivalry was breathed very deeply over much of the poetry of this period; and though it is time to leave the shreds of antique songs, and relics of romance, and attend to the Reformation, which changed for a time the tone of our lyrics, and finally succeeded in impressing them with a purer character, I cannot resist the temptation of quoting Lindsay's description of the rich dress of the Lady of Carrickfergus, rescued by Squire Meldrum. It might be inserted in one of Chaucer's tales, or introduced into one of our best romances, it has so much of the true old Gothic richness about it.

Ane fairer woman than she was,
He had not seen in onie place.
Her kirtle was of scarlet red,
Of gold ane garlond on her head,
Decorit with enamelyne;
Belt and brooches of silver fyne,
Of yellow taftais was her sark,
Begaryit all with broidered work;

Right craftelie with gold and silk:
Then said that ladye white as milk.

The compliments which old Arbuthnot pays to female wit and beauty are worthy of any age, and with them I shall bid farewell to the poets of that time.

The properties perpend
Of every worldly wight,
Sae comely nane are kend,
As is a ladye bright.
Plesand in bed, lowesome and red,
Ane dainty day and night,
Ane halesume thing—ane hearts likinge,
Gif men would rule them right.

When God made all of nought,
He did this weel declare,
The last thing that he wrought,
It was ane woman fair.
In workes we see, the last to be,
Maist plesand and preclair,
Ane help to man God made her than,
What will ye I say mair?

There is nothing new beneath the sun. Burns must be content to share, with the grave Reformer and Principal of Aberdeen College, the fame of the happiest praise ever lavished on woman.

Auld nature swears, the lovely dears
Her noblest work she classes;
Her prentice han' she tried on man,
And then she made the lasses.

Devout men have not scrupled to ascribe to song much of the success of the Reformation; and there can be no doubt that the ironical lyrics, in praise of its modesty and purity, and the satiric songs, in open contempt and scorn of the idle ceremonies, and indecorous pretensions to miraculous gifts of the ministers of the ancient church, had a powerful influence over the public mind. When Knox advanced to demolish the whole structure, and Glencairn to break the hosts of saints in stone and metal, the former found the corner-stones already loosened by a profaner power than his own; and the earl, as he laid the merciless hammer of reform upon the other, found that a stronger spirit had been there before him, dispelling the charm of sanctity, and reducing the deified pieces of metal and stone to their ordinary and proper value. ' But songs have shared in all commotions and revolutions—they are the ready weapons of the learned and the rude—they have fought for the kirk, and they have fought against her—they have been made into the watchword and the war-cry of parties; a meaning beyond the meaning of their authors has been imputed to them; and we know they have had an effect which makes men marvel, who peruse those wonder-working rhymes, when time has sobered down the passions. We have seen how easily a republican song moved men, at a period when all minds were easily moved—the French revolution:—and we have also seen and heard, in a later day, the heroic welcome of the Bruce of Bannockburn, degraded from its office of inspiring sentiments of manly freedom and devotion in defence of our native land, into

the instrument of an illiterate faction of the meanest of mankind. But lyric poets have sung in favour of liberty, and they have sung against it; and the only honest songster I ever heard of was Skirving, who wrote "The Chevalier being void of fear:" for he laughed, and laughed loudly, at Jacobites and Georgites; and he got the reward of all men of the like ungainly integrity; he was plundered by the one, and in danger of being shot by the other.

We may learn from many sources that the mass of song which was popular before the Reformation had much grossness amid its animation, and indulged in sensual images, and spoke in a strain more familiar than virtue wished. The songs at which our ancestors smiled or laughed outright would cover their descendants with blushes; and the gentle hand of reform was as much wanted for our poetry as for our church, to render it fit to live in a more fastidious and critical, though not more virtuous age. It would be unjust to pretend that this age has more virtue, and unwise to suppose that it has a better taste, than the age which produced some of our brightest spirits. The songs which our great-grandmothers sang, we may suppose, gave them delight; and we are not to imagine that their delight came from a source less pure than our own. They were a simple people, who had not learned the art of attiring sensuality in a dainty dress, nor had they found it necessary to live like us in "decencies for ever." Yet I am no admirer of that primitive mode of expression which speaks bluntly out the hopes and wishes of the heart, nor am I sure

that this direct and undisguised style is half so mischievous to innocence and youth as those strains which, like the angler's hook, hide their sting among painted plumes. It was a more honest method of wickedness, at least, and strewed no flowers over the snake which lay in watch for beauty. If our ancestors dispensed with an accurate and blameless style, we have not heard that they were ashamed of what we esteem to be indecorous; and the very freedom and fearlessness with which they wrote led them into aggressions against propriety which education and good sense will always observe. If the Reformation found our lyrics lewd or profane, it soon chastised or admonished them into a dulness which became doubly ludicrous, from the motley garb of irreverence and holiness which they were made to assume in the cause of the church.

I am half afraid to make the assertion, but the history of the decline and downfal of popery in other countries as well as Scotland will support me, that much of this leprosy of licentiousness which infected our poetry was caught when the Muse was doing the work of reform; nay, that it was caught in the very service of the reforming church. When the Muse first commenced her attack on the infirmities of the monks and nuns, she sharpened her satire, by contrasting the external holiness of their establishments with the internal indulgence and sensuality—the coldness without, with the warmth within—their imaginary abstinence with their real gluttony—and their pure looks and humble doctrine with their luxurious beds and unchaste intercourse. As early

her services in the cause of religion were soon forgotten; her succours, though timely and perhaps effectual, came from a profane source; and the stern and anxious spirits who had perfected the work of Reformation were ashamed of the graceless weapons which had shared with them in the honour of vanquishing Antichrist. If poesy, however, was tardy in repentance, and slow in veiling immodesty of thought under more seductive decency of expression, it must be confessed she had leisure allowed to become virtuous; for the fathers of the reformed kirk of Scotland were less scrupulous in matters of poesy and amusement than their immediate successors or descendants.

When the clergy of the Catholic church permitted or encouraged the representation of plays, religious or licentious, on holidays, and on the Sabbath itself, they seemed not to be over-scrupulous in the selection of subjects. The legend of a saint, an exploit of chivalry, an outlaw's den, a story of neighbouring scandal, or a portion of gospel history, afforded in succession amusement, and sometimes perhaps instruction, to the motley audience. Robin Hood in Kendal green, with Maid Marian in her Lincoln kirtle, were followed by Adam and Eve naked, and unashamed as when fresh from Heaven's hand, and discoursing before ladies and lords about their state of innocence. It has been said that such spectacles exhibited the simplicity rather than the libertinism of the age, and that a prudish imagination is much easier alarmed than artless and unsuspecting innocence. But that innocence must have been of a very primitive kind

indeed that could feel no shame at such indecorous representations as this; and at a period when enthusiasm was as fervent, and innocence as common, those spectacles were expressly forbidden, and ample draperies, or garments of leaves, were interposed between the audience and those primitive ladies, those sensual allegories, which were summoned to the amusement of the multitude. The Reformation had been established, and the ancient worship overthrown, for a number of years, before the kirk of Scotland interfered with the representation of loose plays and curious moralities. The earliest care of the kirk extended no farther than to prevent the acting of plays upon the Sabbath day, and to direct the dramatic genius of the times, such as it was, to profaner subjects than scripture: this was in 1574. Two years afterwards, the assembly of the kirk refused permission "to the Bailie of Dumfermline to play on the Sunday afternoon a certain play which was not made upon the canonical parts of Scripture;" and in 1577, they beseeched the Regent, "that his grace would discharge the plays of Robin Hood, King of May, and such others, on the Sabbath day." Nor is there less moderation in the query of the synod concerning the punishment of persons who after admonition from the kirk frequented "May playes," more especially elders and deacons, and others who bore offices in the kirk. There is nothing either fanatical or austere in the answer, "They ought not to be admitted to the sacraments without satisfaction, in especial elders and deacons." The word satisfaction concealed perhaps a greater severity of discipline, and extent of rebuke,

than we associate with the word now; but it has a gentle sound in modern ears, and we may say with the poet, that such strictness was wholesome in the main.

In the ocean of trouble which overwhelmed Scotland much of her ancient spirit was lost, the chivalry of her nobility was nearly extinguished, her sovereign was against her or in bonds, and in the honourable desire of spiritual liberty she nearly became dependent on England. That she retained her independence, we may thank the rising spirit of her peasantry more than the honesty or the valour of her nobles. The time was at hand when the common people of Scotland, escaping from spiritual and personal vassalage, were to assert with success and honour their rights and immunities, and lay the foundation of their present character for intelligence, industry, and literature. But the convulsions of church and state were more favourable to independence, which is always produced in a storm, than to the growth of poetry, which is more the offspring of peace and domestic tranquillity. There can be no doubt, as the love of song is natural to the heart, that it was still dear to the people, but poesy languished beneath the austere or morose enthusiasm of some of our fondest reformers; and as many of our voluntary minstrels were silenced from a sense of the unholiness of rhyme, or from the admonitions of the kirk, minstrelsy became less popular than formerly. A severe and self-denying spirit was communicated to the majority of the people, and the Muse of simple and innocent song became wholly

mute, or breathed in secret her sweet and unwelcome strain.

Some of the pastors, who assisted in forming the primitive kirk, have been described as expressing reluctance in rebuking or in silencing an art, once a national and domestic enjoyment, and still dear from a thousand associations. They might feel afraid, that instead of hiding its light in the dark lantern of a learned language, or wasting its sweetness on cold and intractable religious allegories, the spirit of poesy would seek a profaner road to distinction—and if they thought so, it would seem they were not mistaken. The Muse, learned as well as rustic, seemed willing to divorce herself from all alliance with the kirk, and was anxious to regain her former influence over the mind of the multitude; and she made the attempt in strains equally pithy, sarcastic, and indecorous, as those with which, in her more popular days, she had braved and alarmed the church of Rome. In addressing herself to those who silenced the minstrel's instrument, and the poet's voice, she represents the interference of the elders and ministers in the domestic management of families as equalling auricular confession; she paints them with eyes which knew no tears, with hearts of stone, and features of iron. Nor did she confine herself wholly to satiric song: she remembered how deeply her dramatic attempts affected the church of Rome, and she tried the same sharp weapon; but she tried it with a feebler hand, and upon a less vulnerable body. If I may measure the grossness or the wit of those attempts by a dramatic song which

I recovered from tradition, I can imagine that they fairly rivalled the productions with which the ancient church was assailed, in impurity and humour. It is the confession of a sensual sinner before the kirk session, and the minister and his elders are ridiculed by the transgressor, as he gives "satisfaction," in a way singularly keen and pointed. I have been present when it was acted as a kind of interlude at a wedding. The rustic who performed it came in attired in sackcloth from neck to heel, a leathern belt girded his middle, while a quantity of long flax, falling over his temples from under a slouched hat, made him resemble the man in "Rome's Legacy to the Kirk of Scotland." The gray head of the transgressor, and the youthfulness of the sin, his ludicrous song, and still more ludicrous acting, the imaginary audience of grave ministers of religion, and the real audience of shepherds and ploughmen, who, like the humble hero of the song, were

Contented wi' little, and cantie wi' mair,

formed a scene well worthy of laughter. This description may recall to some of my south border friends the witty but irreverend ballad of "Auld Glenae."

The kirk, it would appear, hearkened at first to those scoffing and indecorous strains with carelessness or contempt. It was too surely founded in the feelings of the people to be easily shaken by the idle song of a vagrant minstrel; and perhaps the professors hoped that neglect might crush the folly of verse more effectually than kirk censure. But either the Muse became more insolent, or

the preachers less patient; or probably forsaking the courtesy of general satire, she lifted her voice against them by name, or lent her aid to swell the clamour of disturbance or rebellion. We have the authority of John Knox for relating that one Wilson, who neither could read the New Testament nor the Old, made a despiteful railing ballad against the preachers, for which he narrowly escaped hanging. The reformed kirk might be more pure than the Catholic church, but it was scarcely more meek in its prosperity; in times such as those the passions of men were up and inflamed: French cunning and English force—the ferocity of the old religion, and the fury of the new, made justice rare, and mercy scarce. In such tumultuous days, it is with much pleasure that I find one honest man, who had the boldness to sing a song creditable to a patriotic heart. When the "Congregation of the Lord," reinforced by the English army, opposed the army of the Queen Regent, in which was a considerable body of French commanded by Count de Martigues, and some severe skirmishes happened at Leith, a song, of which the following is an extract, was made and sung—I hope it had a response in many a Scottish bosom.

I have nae will to sing or dance,
For fear of England or of France,
God send them sorrow and mischance,
  Is cause of their coming.
We are sae rewlit, rich and poor,
That we wot not where to be sure,

The border as the burrow-moor,
Where some perchance will hing.
And yet I think it best that we
Pluck up our hearts and merry be,
For though we would lie down and die,
It will help us nae thing.

An attempt of a more charitable kind was soon made to humble profane minstrelsy, and minstrelsy never stood in greater need of purification. As the kirk increased in austerity, the songs increased in licentiousness, and grew so grievously lewd, that pious persons imagined them to be rather the creations of the devil than the musings of man. Nay, in one instance, Belzebub was heard to chant one of his most graceless strains amid a conclave of witches; and with such wicked speed did this infernal lyric fly over the land, that scarcely two days elapsed ere all the young men and young women were singing it. Either the kirk had laboured to little purpose in lessening sin and in cultivating morality, or this supernatural song had a charm which a poet would gladly learn—that of catching and keeping attention. To go to a contest with the powers of darkness corresponded with the character of those times; and tradition makes a professor of religion array himself, and march to dubious warfare with a wicked spirit, in the same manner that a knight of old, with a spear in his hand, and his lady's glove in his helmet, rode to the encounter of a dragon or a sorcerer. In entering into competition in song with the powers of darkness or ungodliness, the

kirk had a twofold object—it would vanquish a dangerous, or at least a troublesome foe, and impress a character of decorum and religion on the popular lyrics of the land. For this purpose one or more of the inspired reformers undertook the singular and perilous task of enlisting profane airs into the service of religion, by uniting them to poetry of a purer and more devotional kind. The idea was excellent and practicable, but the way in which it was executed was absurd and ludicrous; the lyric powers of the preachers were unequal to their curious and important task—their songs were grave moralities, and their ballads dull sermons.

The wishes of the kirk were honestly set forth at the front of the work, and the title may help us to imagine the lyric cheer which was provided by Wedderburn for the youths and maidens of Scotland, in the year 1560. "Ane compendius Book of godly and spiritual Songs, collected out of sundrie parts of the scripture, with sundrie of other ballads changed out of profane songs, for avoiding of sin and harlotrey, with augmentation of sundrie good and godly ballads, not contained in the first edition." The prologue farther intimates the original purpose of the work, and it would seem when it first appeared that the reformation was incomplete. It was dedicated to the use of "Young persons, and such as are not exercised in scripture, who will sooner conceive the true word than when they hear it sung in Latin, which they understand not. But when they hear it sung, or sing it themselves in their native tongue, with sweet melody, then shall they love their God, and put

away bawdry and unclean songs." In the same spirit, and in continuation of the same warfare against unclean or profane song, William Geddes, minister of Wick, wrote the "Saint's Recreation," in 1683, a collection of spiritual songs, "suited," says the author, "to grave, sweet, and melodious tunes." He is as dull in spiritual song as any of his predecessors; yet he says some curious things in his preface, which assist us in estimating the character of our ancient lyrics. He supposes one of his readers to insinuate that some of these airs or tunes were popularly sung to "amorous sonnets;" and to this he answers, first, that he imitates certain pious and zealous divines, who to good purpose composed godly songs to profane airs, such as "The bonnie broom," "I'll never leave thee," and "We 'll all go pu' the heather." "And, secondly," says the divine, "it is alleged by some, and not without some colour of reason, that many of our airs or tunes are made by good angels, but the letter or lines of our songs by devils. We choose the part angelical, and leave the diabolical." Of these celestial lyrics, which were to interpose between the powers of darkness and their prey, and overthrow their poetical empire in the north, it is proper to give some account.

To substitute devout and religious songs in place of the witty, or profane, or pathetic verses, some of which were coeval with their airs, and all popular, required a poetic gift, which has been conferred on few, and a taste and tact akin to inspiration. No such powers were confided to our kirk minstrels—lyric poesy refused to appear under the kirk banners, and the reformation of

verse was found more laborious than the overthrow of popery. Amid all the unavailing attempts of the "gude and godly ballates" of Wedderburn to fan the fires of devotion into a brighter flame than those of worldly love, there is nothing which warms or elevates. In these religious parodies of profane song, the original purpose of the verse is never forgotten—the original meaning is never wholly subdued—there is still as much of the graceless old as enables it to prevail against the devout new. The effect of this kind of spiritualized sensuality upon ordinary and simple minds must have been instructive and curious. Acquainted as they were with the sensible and intelligible images of the profane song, can we think they would labour much to understand the allegorical instruction of the spiritual? To hear religion indulging in the current language of literal love with some fair maiden, trysting her out to a stolen and a twilight interview, and praising the darkness of her eyes, the beauty of her locks, and the ripeness of her lips, was far less likely to excite an ardour for the kirk than for the fair dames who frequented it. The peasantry to whom these devout meditations were more particularly addressed were somewhat dull in comprehending allegory, and unversed in the new art of spiritualization; and it was as easy, and perhaps more agreeable, to accept the joys which the song expressed in a literal way. From the religious songs of that and the succeeding ages, which live more in our curiosity than our esteem, I will endeavour to select some specimens.

That many of the songs, which the kirk lyrics were composed to supplant, abounded in lascivious wit and gross humour, we have satisfactory evidence; but I am far from sure that the sedate poet was always successful in supplying a purer and a better strain. The young and the joyous, who were alive to the power of association when they sung the following song, must have been possessed with presbyterianism beyond all example, if it failed to present to their minds any images but those of love and enjoyment. I may remark that the paraphrase is far too close: the new usurps the rhyme of the old; the lascivious dress is worn; and though the meaning is free from reproach, the sounds of the graceless and the good are so much alike as to deceive a careless listener—we know not which is devil, which is saint.

Who is at my window, who, who?
Go from my window, go, go.
Who calls there so like a stranger?
Go from my window, go, go.

Man, I gave thee not free will,
That thou should my gospel spill:
Thou does nae gude, but ever ill,
Therefore from my door thou go.

That will, alas! has me beguiled,
That will sae far has me defiled,
That will thy presence has me exiled,
In at thy door let me go.

To blame that will thou does not right,
I gave thee reason whereby thou might
Have known the day from the dark night
In at my door to go.

And were it fit to do again,
Rather as thou should lie in pain,
I would suffer mair in certaine,
That in at my door thou may go.

I ask nae thing of thee therefore,
But love for love to lie in store;
Give me thy heart, I ask no more,
And in at my door thou shalt go.

Who is at my window, who, who?
Go from my window, go, go.
Cry no more there like a stranger,
But in at my door thou go.

The first and last verses of this half spiritual and half amorous ditty are old; the dramatic cast of the lascivious song is imitated, and the importunate language of the lover and the yielding resolution of the lady are not concealed under a very thick veil of allegory. Nor is there better skill or greater delicacy in the attempt to reclaim another of these popular ditties: the gross and literal chorus, by the frequency of its recurrence, seems capable of poisoning the divinest verse; and here the

body of the song assists in strengthening the lewd sentiment of the old ditty, rather than in lessening it.

John, come kiss me now,
John, come kiss me now,
John, come kiss me by and by,
And make nae mair ado.

The Lord thy God I am,
That John does thee call:
John represents man
By grace celestial.

For John, Goddis grace it is,
Who list till expone the same:
O John, thou did amiss
When that thou lost this name.

My prophets call, my preachers cry
John, come kiss me now,
John, come kiss me by and by,
And make nae mair ado.

I know not where to find such a specimen of gross expression and devout meaning, mixed up with an attempt so singularly clumsy and unhappy, to expound an intractable allegory. In hearing this half converted lyric sung, the listener would be more apt to think of the sins from which it was meet he should be warned than of

the graver joys to which the reformed strain now sought to call him. To those who loved, and they must have been many, the old song of

He's low down, amang the broom,
That's waiting for me,

the new language which the pious poet caused it to utter would have a strange sound and a mixed meaning:

My love mourns for me, for me,
My love that mourns for me;
I am not kind, he's not in mind,
My love that mourns for me.

Though purified in the religious crucible, and stamped afresh in new language, and with a different meaning, such is the influence of association, that we still imagine we hear the interdicted strain; and we cannot help seeing the forbidden scenes of the old song rising before us. In such hands the profane airs of Scotland must have proved a very dubious auxiliary in the cause of purity and truth; and when religion called so anxiously for the aid of the lyric Muse, it is a reproach to the age that her call brought out no better and more inspired spirit than Wedderburn. Perhaps no period in our history presented such an opportunity to a poet of acquiring lasting renown. A purer and a nobler strain would have been welcomed by the professors of religion, and by the community at large: an age that could tolerate or applaud

the rude and fanatic verses of the kirk minstrels was avaricious of poetry.

But if the authors of these spiritual songs failed in overcoming the popularity of the unclean verses—if they did not wholly succeed in making the tongue of devotion talk more sweetly than the lips of worldly love—if they rendered the spiritual conversation between "the flesche" and "the spirit" the dullest of all controversies, they did not altogether fail in their wish to overwhelm with scorn and loathing the contemporary church of Rome. The spirits of the age had been disciplined more for this sharp and perilous work than

> For capering nimbly in a lady's chamber,
> To the lascivious pleasing of a lute,

or even freezing woman into a spiritual allegory for the edification of the multitude. But in the contempt for masses, crosses, confessions, beads, and pastoral crooks, they sometimes forgot they were singing for the improvement of poesie; and in their descriptions of the scarlet lady and her monks and hand-maidens, they neglected the morality of their flocks. It is hard to disbelieve an author's own averment; but when he says he is singing a devout ballad, he is only entitled to belief if his strain correspond with his assertion: and it is scarcely credible that a work dedicated to delicacy and holiness could relapse into descriptions worthy of the lax minstrels whose lewd songs were so properly condemned; yet I know not where to seek for scenes of greater lasciviousness than

some of these spiritual ballads contain, and in passages too where there is no desire to hide the meaning under the thick or transparent veil of metaphor or allegory. Those who think me severe, and who are unacquainted with the slumbering songs of our ancestors, I may refer to a very lively but a very lewd ballad, of which the following is rather a modest specimen.

The Sisters gray, before this day,
  Did croon within their closter;
They feed ane Freir their keys to bear,
  The fiend receive the foster.
Syne in the mirk he weill could wirk,
  And kittle them wantonlie:
Haye trix! trim go trix
  Under the greenwood tree.

I might also refer them to others equally indelicate. In their love of exposing impurities they forgot that their exordium was holiness and chastity, and that they had undertaken to compose songs which men could sing without shame, and women without blushing. Their satire was coarse, vigorous, and effectual; and they had some skill in exposing the infirmities of the friars and nuns: yet I am not certain that Wedderburn ever sang aught so sharp as John Wickliffe said two hundred years before. "The priests don not well their godly office, but live in covetousness and gluttony, drunkenness and lechery, with fair horse and jolly and gay

saddles and bridles ringing by the way, and themselves in costly cloths and pelure, while their poor neighbours perish for hunger and cold."—Wedderburn has sometimes aspired to equal the animated pictures of our great reformers, and he gives the church of Rome some "Apostolic blows and knocks."

Sum make gods of sticks and stanes,
Sum make gods of sainctis banes.

There is considerable freedom and strength in the ballad in derision of mass; and the following allusion to the great point of human controversy, the real presence, may seem blasphemy to some, and sharp good wit to others.

Gif God was made of bits of bread,
  Eat ye not weekly sax or seven,
As it had been ane mortal feed,
  While ye had almost herried heaven?
Als monie devils ye maun devour
  Till hell grows less,
Or doubtless we daur not restore
  You to your mess.
Gif God be transubstantiall
  In bread, with hoc est corpus meum,
Why are ye so unnatural
  As take him in your teeth and slay him?

There is some happiness of personification in the following verse, and those with mitres on their heads, and

those with mitres in their heads, would do well to read it and think of it.

Ye parted with dame Poverty,
  Took Property to be your wife;
From Charity and Chastity,
  With Lechery ye led your life;
Which raised the mother of mischief,
    Your greediness,
Believing aye to get relief
    For saying mess.

Before I take farewell of these spiritual allegories and lyrical satires, and seek out the Muse of Song when she had escaped from the impurities of one church and the injustice of another, and resumed her own sweet and natural and unbidden strain, let me say something of the new impulse which the Reformation gave to genius, and the change which it wrought in the beliefs and the joys and the feelings of our ancestors. The wild and variable fictions of romance; the legends of the church swollen into interminable histories of miracles and wonders which prayer and mortification had wrought; and the representation of dramatic stories, where satyrs, and devils, and angels, and souls of men, were called up for the instruction or the laughter of the audience, all vanished away before a religion which limited its belief to things recorded only in holy writ. The world, indeed, might well be weary of the eternal monotony of romances and spiritual legends, and sensual moralities; and to free

itself from their incumbrance, and seek for instruction and rational amusement, required an effort such as Scotland made when she threw down the splendid fabrics which vanity, or superstition, or repentance, had been so long in rearing, and discharged the flocks of friars and religious devotees from the luxury of soft and agreeable penance, the dreams of indolence, the monotony of idle processions and barren ceremonies, and the pleasure of holding the people in subjection and the princes in awe. But Scotland was not allowed to reap the harvest which she sowed; wars followed on wars, struggle succeeded struggle for civil or religious liberty; and her long contention with the churches of Rome and England stamped an outward sternness upon her which was long in being softened. We are not, however, to estimate the influence which the Reformation had upon the Scottish mind and upon Scottish song by the spiritual ditties of the divines, nor by the contentious sermons and controversial histories of the elder worthies of the kirk. There were other and gentler spirits, who, escaping from the bitterness of party rancour, sought to expatiate in secret upon meek, and rural, and domestic things; and, in the midst of sore trials and national calamity, gave an example of purity of sentiment, tenderness of heart, and richness of fancy, worthy of better times and a higher fame. I allude to the poems of Alexander Hume, parson of Logie, to the allegorical poem of Alexander Montgomery, and to some others of inferior merit, which breathe the same piety and purity, inspired ardour of sentiment, and description. It is in the "Thanks for a Summer's Day"

of the first, and in the "Cherry and the Slae" of the second, that we are to look for and find those redeeming graces which Wedderburn sought in vain to infuse into the iniquitous strains of the wandering minstrels. I am sorry that the former, who seems to have had some of the best qualities of the popular Muse about him, refrained from lyric composition; and I also wonder how his "Summer's Day," during the rage for singing songs of immeasurable length, escaped being sung. That the "Cherry and the Slae" was sung, we have sufficient evidence; but our ancestors had fewer pleasures than their descendants, and listened to a long narrative, or a moral strain, with a patience very unlike that of the volatile audiences which gather to applaud or damn a poet's performance now. I cannot well refrain from speaking of Hume, nor can I easily resist quoting his "Summer's Day," from which I have received so much pleasure, and in which I am willing to believe I see the first dawn of the great national, descriptive, and moral poem of Thomson. To Hume, and to such as Hume, I feel more desire to attribute the change which was wrought in the external decorum and inward chastity of our national songs, than to the mortification and ridicule to which they were exposed by the strange transmutations they suffered in the "good and godly ballates." The impurities of song were overlaid rather than amended by cumbrous spiritualization and leaden allegory; and if our future poetry attached itself more to the blissful and balmy side of human nature, expressed a meekness in its joy and a quieter transport

in its love, a modesty and a reverence in its humour, and a gravity amidst its extravagance, we may seek for the cause rather in the example which was set than in the rebuke or persecution which was suffered.

It may startle some, and offend others, that I impute part of the reformation wrought upon our lyrics to the translation of Scripture and the version of the Psalms. When the sacred word was unsealed to the multitude, the peasantry of Scotland, a poetical and imaginative people, dwelling among the mountains, and watching their flocks amid scenery not much unlike that of Palestine, must have felt very strongly the pastoral beauty, and simple grace, and chaste elegance of many of the psalms of David, and the Song of his Son. They would read a lesson there how inviting nature and truth may be made with perfect innocence; and how much female loveliness was increased by the welcome absence of impure thought or indecorous expression. I shall be told of the unmelodious and unpoetical version of the rhymed psalms; but who will make a better? and, above all, who will make a work which may dismiss those simple compositions from memory and from reverence, and supply their place? More elegance and more melody might be brought to the task, but who will bring the fame of two hundred years? and who will bring that antique simplicity now sanctified as scriptural? In Scotland the psalms have been long popular; they are committed to the care of early memory before we learn to square our affections by the rules of critics, and they continue with us through life endeared by many recol-

lections. Delight may combine with duty in this; but it requires not the impulse of duty to learn many of the psalms. The eighth psalm, with almost a total absence of rhyme in some of the verses, and with some imperfection in its harmony, and some embarrassment in its sentiment, is one of the most beautiful poems in the language.

It was somewhere about the year 1540 that the Psalms were rendered fit for the accompaniment of music, by the protestants of Flanders; and it was in 1555 that Knox returned from Geneva, impressed with the purity and propriety of Calvin's institutions, and resolved to confer them on Scotland. At this time the psalms of Clement Marot and his friend Theodore Beza were separated from the profane ballad-airs to which they were currently sung, and fitted with solemn music to accompany the catechism of Geneva. That Knox and his fellow-labourers in reform introduced the love of psalmody into the Scottish kirk, there can be little doubt: and far more successful than the author of the spiritual ballads, the translators of our version succeeded in their object, if their wish was popularity. Those who may desire to know something of the poet whose version of the psalms gave as great an impulse to poetry as to the Reformation, will read with pleasure not unmingled with pain the following account of Clement Marot.

"Among the grooms of the bedchamber to Francis the First of France was one Clement Marot, born at Danean, a man naturally eloquent, of a voluble fluent tongue, having a rare vein in French poetry, wherewith

the king was much taken, who kept him as a choice instrument of his learned pleasures. But as his wit was something better than his conditions, by his acquaintance with the Lutherans he was suspected of having changed his religion; and therefore, fearing the king would be offended, he fled to his majesty's sister at Bearn, the old sanctuary for delinquents. Awhile after the king was pacified, and he returned to Paris, where he was advised by his friend, Francis Vatable, the Hebrew lecturer, to leave the trifling subjects he wrote upon, and study divine poesie. Hereupon he began to translate the Hebrew prophet into French stanzas, but so ignorantly and perversely, as a man altogether unlearned, that the king, though he often sung his verses, yet, upon the just complaints of the Sorbonne doctors and their severe censure passed against them, commanded that nothing of Marot's in that kind should be from thenceforth published. But being forbid by proclamation, as it often happens, the longing of the reader and the fame of the work were increased; so that new tunes were set to Marot's rhymes, and they were sung like profane ballads. He in the meantime growing bold by the people's applauses and not able to forbear bragging, for fear of punishment fled to Geneva, and flying from thence for new crimes committed, but first having been well whipt for them, he died at Austune. The success of this translation moved Theodore Beza, a friend of Marot, who wrote an elegy upon his death, to join to the fifty which he had printed the other hundred in French metre too; so the whole book of David's Psalms

was finished. And to make it pleasing to the people, they had several tunes set to them by eminent composers that chimed so sweetly, that every one desired to have the new psalter. But many errors being detected in it against religion, and the work therefore prohibited—as well because the verses of the prophet were published in a vulgar tongue by profane persons, as that they were, *dolo malo*, bound up with Calvin's catechism at Geneva—these singing psalms, though abhorred and slighted by the Catholics, remained in high esteem with the heretics; and the custom of singing Geneva psalms in public meetings, and on the highway, and in shops, was thenceforth taken for the distinctive sign of a sectary."

Such is the account of one who, with no friendly voice to heretical poetry, acknowledges its popularity and its effect on the multitude. When it moved other nations, are we to suppose that it left our own unmoved? If song is the natural voice of the heart and of the fancy, we may suppose sacred song to be the first fruits of religion, the earliest praise-offering of the heart and mind. The scriptures, whether in the poetic prose of the prophets or in the rhymed translations of our own worthies, have impressed a peculiar stamp upon the Scottish feeling and character, which is abundantly visible in conversation and in song. In matters of allusion and illustration, in the colour and pressure of thought, in dramatic detail and graphic simplicity, the poetry and the prose of Scotland have largely profited; and though we have departed a little from this more primitive and ex-

pressive style, in quest of a more pointed elegance and greater courtliness of phrase, we have gained less in grace than we have lost in strength, and spirit, and truth. It has even been made a matter of reproach to Scotland, that the wit or humour of her sons, whether within the limits of strict decorum or in the debateable land between modesty and licentiousness, is all alike more or less tinctured with scriptural learning or reference. I mention this, not from a conviction of its truth, because I believe a Scotchman abuses a devout education in this way as little as any one; but rather for the purpose of showing that manner has been mistaken for matter. In the slow speech and melodious utterance of the people of the lowlands, others have distinguished, or imagined they distinguished, the descendants and scholars of a nation of preachers, poets, and enthusiasts.

The character and condition of our peasantry were equally favourable for receiving and perpetuating the change which the reformation wrought; and the scripture, which the wisdom of man opened for the first time to their eyes, presented, among its descriptions of patriarchal establishments, a distinct image of their own. Portioners and farmers lived in something of a patriarchal state at the head of their various and numerous households; and the shearing of their sheep, the watching of their flocks, the cultivation of the ground, the rapid rivers, the steep green hills, the alternate changes from hill to dale, from corn to grass, all contributed to assimilate the songs or scenes of scripture with the place

of their birth. This life of pastoral, and, if you will, of rustic ease, afforded much leisure for music and for verse. The shepherd on his hill, the maiden milking her ewes, or pressing the white curd with as white a hand, the mountains covered with sheep, the valleys patched with corn, the change of season, and the pleasures of the winter evening, the song, the mirth, and the dance, were all circumstances more favourable for poesie than the noisy toil of the mechanic, the din of the anvil, the rattle of the loom, or the mason's hammer and the dusty stone. "The vacant shepherd piping in the dale," whom the poet saw in the vision of Indolence, was every where seen; while a maiden responded to his music in a strain which belonged to his heart, and was perhaps his own composition. Commerce, before which I am afraid the simplicity of man as well as his mirth, his music, and his song, have ever flown, penetrated but partially into the pastoral recesses of the border: the haunts of the Muse were long unprofaned by the introduction of manufactures; the streams were shallow and the mountains rough; and man had not condescended to become a mere engine, and to ruin his health to make gold for others. The hind built his own house, and exchanged his own pastoral wealth for the productions of the town, while his wife or his daughter spun or bleached or sewed; and the pride of the one was to be supereminent in the management of his flocks, and of the other to be unrivalled in domestic economy, to wear the finest home-made mantle, and bleach the fairest linen on the rivulet bank. The martial shepherds of the border, after the

accession of James, laid aside their coats of mail and hung up their spears, and gradually subsided into a quiet and industrious people. With their warlike occupation the warlike spirit of their ballads also departed; and the devout and moral character of the people, called into poetic action by the presence of long absent repose, was breathed out in strains of wedded joy and youthful love equally pure and affectionate. Nor have I drawn an ideal picture: a fireside like that which I have briefly sketched may still be found remote from towns, and hid among the bosoms of the inland hills, presenting at once an image of opulence and originality akin to the domestic painting of Hugh Latimer. "My father was a yeoman, and had lands of his own, only he had a farm of three or four pounds by year at uttermost; and hereupon he tilled as much as kept half a dozen men. He had a walk for a hundred sheep, and my mother milked thirty kine. He was able, and did find the king a harness with himself and his horse, while he came to the place that he should receive the king's wages. He kept me at school, else I had not been able to preach before the king's majesty now. He married my sisters with five pound, or twenty nobles, apiece; so that he brought them up in godliness and fear of God. He kept hospitality for his poor neighbours, and some alms he gave to the poor, and all he did of the said farm."

Much has been said of the share which the beauteous person and fine talents of queen Mary had in inspiring verse; but I have yet to learn from tradition or from history that the charms of her person or the accom-

plishments of her mind gave rise to any thing better than unhappy strife and civil and religious commotion. Her short and stormy reign was injurious to her native land; her youth and her beauty conspired against her peace, and the moments of her life were numbered by sorrow, by shame, and the bitterness of captivity. Her return from France to Scotland was welcomed by two parties, who in their turns subjected their country to the intrusion of English and French mercenaries; and perhaps the only people who welcomed her cordially were the vagrant musicians and minstrels, who saluted her with the sound of fiddle and rebec as she passed along the streets of Edinburgh. The courtly Brantome speaks of these pedestrian musicians or minstrels with the contempt with which a Frenchman regards all nations save his own; but John Knox calls them a company of most honest men, who with instruments of music gave their salutations at her chamber-window. "The melody," as she alleged, "liked her well, and she willed the same might be continued some nights after with great diligence." A beauty, a poetess, and a queen, she returned to her country amid cruel discord—amid the rancour of religious strife, of all strifes the most deadly, augmented by Catholic artifice and the treachery and cunning of her more powerful rival and sister queen, Elizabeth. Her own follies, the follies of her subjects, and the perfidy of those in whom she trusted, alike demand and obtain our sorrow and our hate. Neither her loveliness, nor the desolate situation in which she stood, inspired a strain which was worthy to live, or armed in her defence a man

who had courage or virtue equal to her protection. If the Muse raised her voice in her praise or her defence, it must have been as feeble and ineffectual as the hands and swords of the Hamiltons at Langside. Much has been written in Mary's praise, and much has been written against her.—I am not sure that she was any worse or any better than the times in which she lived: those who wish to think her pure will require great dexterity of argument and an array of proof such as has never yet been exhibited; and those who desire to hold her up to loathing and contempt would be wise to say nothing of the virgin queen and the wishes she expressed to Sir Amias Powlet or Sir Drue Drury; nor to mention the holy perfidy which forged the letters and sonnets, and published them in her name.

If I distrust the accusations of her enemies, can I confide in the eulogiums of her friends? They differ in all other things and agree but in this, that Mary was of beauty transcending all living beauty, and of genius nearly rivalling her personal charms. Of these there can be no doubt; and if there were, it is now too late to express it. The fame of her beauty, like the story of her misfortunes, has been diffused over the world by tradition, by history, by the painter's hand, and Elizabeth's unwilling tongue; and he who seeks to lessen it is only an object for laughter. Her beauty seems to me of a peculiar character—an exquisite union of thought and form, resembling nothing in painting or sculpture.—I am willing to believe I see in her face the character of the daughters of Scotland, expressed

only with a rarer happiness and regularity. Her genius is much more questionable than her loveliness: her education, half Scottish, half French, was unfriendly to the growth of aught original and vivid—she would lose the free native force of her own tongue, and never wholly attain that of France. The unhappy religious dissensions which beset her on all sides, and finally overwhelmed her, were unfavourable to the unfolding of genius, which, sensitive as a flower, is shut with the storm and opens with the sunshine. Religious discord and religious hate froze up men's hearts, and the heroes of the days of Robert Bruce and his descendant, Mary Stuart, seem different races of people. The hand that opened the doors of heaven seemed to have closed those of happiness, and benevolence, and mercy—the sword and the sermon united against her—and highly gifted as she certainly was, could we expect her to show her taste or her fancy amid civil broil and the torture of long imprisonment? The thrush sings not under the shadow of the raven's wing. Her beauty was her great enemy; her wit led her to the scaffold; and such was the influence of religious hate, that the Scottish nobles looked silently on while her blood was unjustly spilt, and one, only one, had the courage to draw his sword, and say, "That is my answer to England." Joseph Ritson, who was not much under the influence of romantic feeling, and who seldom expressed sorrow beyond the narrow circle in which as a mere antiquarian he had allowed his spirit to be spell-bound, seems nearly moved to tears with the beauty, and genius, and mis-

fortunes of Mary. "Her testament and letters," he observes, "which the writer of these pages has seen, blotted with her tears, in the Scots' College, Paris, will remain perpetual monuments of singular abilities, tenderness, and affection—of a head and heart, in short, of which no other queen in the world was probably ever possessed." The lyric genius which Brantome ascribes to her is concealed from me in the language of France, and in any translations which I have consulted much of the native sweetness, and grace, and unsolicited ease of expression which the originals possessed, has evaporated. A song is like a flower in full bloom, which cannot well be transplanted without diminishing its beauty and impairing its fragrance.

I have already noticed the change which the Reformation sought to produce and partly succeeded in effecting in the purity of song. The accession of the Stuarts to the throne of England, by bringing peace and security to the land of poetry, changed the note of the trumpet into the breathings of the pipe, and substituted the domestic for the martial spirit of our lyrics. It was this sudden transformation of the sword into the ploughshare, of the spear into the shepherd's staff, which probably let loose a pastoral flood over the land, and filled our songs with strange and affected names, and steeped our moorland landscapes in Arcadian dews. Many of the strains of our scholars and our professed authors want the sharp original stamp which native genius takes at first hand from nature; and possessed more with the Muse of Italy or Greece than of Scotland, they sought to brighten our

suns and soften down our landscapes till they rivalled those of other climes. Through the influence of learning, and the decrease, or rather extinction, of chivalry, poetry became more or less the pursuit of many of those who desired to be thought elegant or accomplished: the offspring of the heart was succeeded by the offspring of the head; and printing, unloosing the seals which ignorance had placed on the literature of other nations, presented a readier way of finding images and thoughts than seeking them in the bosoms of nature and of man. The spirit of learning and of trade came more and more into literature; and the inspiration of which the heathen poets boasted, inasmuch as they sang from the impulse of nature and the fulness of the heart, descended on few. They were not all prophets who imagined they prophesied; nor did the Muse, perhaps, condescend to commune with all alike among those who invoked her. A great portion of the time which followed the accession of James and preceded the Revolution under his grandson was barren both of learned and of rustic verse. Convulsion followed on convulsion; the religion of the people's heart was sought to be overthrown; and they drew the sword in defence of civil and religious liberty. An ancient line of native princes was banished like aliens, and a prince or protector, half hero, half tyrant, succeeded. Scotland was invaded and subdued, but her enemies died or were weakened by discord, and her ancient princes were recalled. They returned only to imprison, persecute, and slay; and having learned nothing from adversity but to reward good with evil, were driven

again into an ignominious and perpetual exile. In the midst of all this strife and commotion, the Muse of England sang some of her most joyous strains; but her sister of the north, crushed in spirit, and persecuted in her sons, and troubled probably in conscience, remained silent; nor could either the triumph of the kirk, or the romantic deeds of James Grahame, woo from her sullen lips a single verse of triumph or of sorrow. We have, therefore, no songs in honour of the kirk—a theme accounted, perhaps, too holy for a profane art—and we have no songs in praise, either of the valour which so effectually checked the arbitrary career of the first Charles, or of the heroism which sought to win his throne for his son from the bravery of Fairfax and the cunning of Cromwell. "Songs and ballads," says Addison, "the creation and the delight of the commonalty, cannot fail to please all such readers as are not unqualified for the entertainment by their affectation or their ignorance; and the reason is plain, because the same paintings of nature which recommend them to the most ordinary reader also recommend them to the most refined." But this was a time when the breathings of the lyric Muse seemed to have lost their influence in the north—the long and bloody struggle between the episcopal and presbyterian churches was more disastrous for Scotland, and saddened down her poetic spirit more, than did all the wars with the Edwards, or her fierce and successful contest with the church of Rome. Not only did no master-spirit in poetry arise, but it would seem that the rustic Muse was also mute,

and no longer contributed any of those rude but graphic and vivid verses which are so common in Scottish song. Our songs, with the exception of a few which had found sanctuary in the collections of the curious, were fast departing from the memories of our ancestors—they had long been lessened in public esteem, and were regarded by the professors of religion as the flowers with which the enemy of grace strewed the paths of temptation. It may well be imagined, that men who gave their nights to meditation and their days to self-denial could have little sympathy with love, and with the expression of the tenderer passions in poetry. Women were regarded by some of these stern worthies as little else than whited walls, and stumbling-blocks, and ensnarers of the sage and the devout. Scripture was quoted against the splendour of their dresses; the care with which they curled their love-locks furnished matter for a sermon; and their numbers and their beauty suggested to the castigated minds of some preachers an image of the strength and extent of Satan's empire on earth. During the continuance of this unwholesome system of kirk discipline, dancing was accounted a profane amusement; men were rebuked for listening or moving to the sound of any music save that of psalmody; and those who wished to learn this ancient and forbidden art were obliged to go in private and enjoy it with the terror of kirk-rebuke before them. I remember when the sons of a venerable and strict Cameronian stole out secretly every evening to a dancing school; but I have always

had a suspicion that the old worthy was aware of this backsliding of his offspring; and it was remarked, that in his prayers, which were exceedingly long and curious, he sought grace for those who "foolishly flang on a floor, and who leaped, and danced, and bent the knees (which should bend only to Him above) to a musical idol of wood and thairm."

Yet I cannot accuse the Cameronian worthy alone of compromising the principles of his sect, for I remember when many of the graver members of the established kirk accounted dancing an act little better than sinful, and sighed to think that a more relaxed state of discipline and greater freedom of manners had rendered the knowledge of this evolution of antichrist a necessary part of youthful education. Even apparel came in for a share of the consideration of the kirk; and simplicity and gravity in dress were commanded with an exactness of description which proves the earnestness of the preachers and their determination to be understood. Nor was it in the earlier days of the reformed kirk that this outward austerity was recommended and practised —that the self-denial of externals was considered a token of a purer and more sanctified spirit; it descended to a period within living men's memory, and it cannot be denied that it suited the condition of a poor and industrious people. But the silks and the scarlets against which the reformers and their successors lifted up their voices were out of the reach of the mechanic and the husbandman, till the activity of trade and the specu-

lations of commerce brought gold among our vales and hills, and then plenty grew too strong for the influence of the kirk, and homely gowns and homespun mantles were laid aside for the more splendid and more costly labours of the eastern looms.

That the constraint put upon harmless mirth and the limitations assigned to dress had any particular influence upon the character of our songs, I am not quite ready to say; but the example or precept of the old and the devout had their full authority among the northern dales, and I think the progress of song must have at least suffered a sore rebuke when the aged forbade the dance, and the serious considered it as a matter rather to be endured than applauded. It is true that the kirk had provided a substitute for the profane amusement of song; but the spiritual lyrics failed of taking a lasting hold on the popular mind—they were sermons set to tunes which suited only the staid and the self-denying. It fared otherwise with the religious letters of some of our early divines, which had a wide circulation, and found their way into the hands of the young and old, of the merry and the grave. I am afraid I must impute some of this success to the mistake which one with a moderate share of wisdom might readily make of supposing the spiritual courtships, which the letters described so lusciously, as real rather than figurative; and that the youth who wooed so warmly and so eloquently sought a more pleasing bride than an allegory. Few could read them and remain in the frame of mind which the divine

wished. Meston, in describing a sedate presbyterian dame, says,

She reads a letter
In Rutherford, and seldom misses
To light on those which mention kisses.

When age could make such a slip, can we expect youth to be wiser? It was about this period, too, if we may credit the assurance of Sinclair, that the enemy of mankind appeared in the most beautiful and seducing shape among the sons of men, and placed their souls and bodies in extreme hazard. Nor was the fiend content with nocturnal exhibitions in the shape, and wearing the hue and grace, of female beauty; but on one occasion he composed and sang a song which became suddenly popular: I am sorry that neither scorn nor fear induced the author of "Satan's Invisible World Discovered" to preserve one verse of this infernal lyric. At another time the same evil power cheered the witches of a western district with a singular exhibition of minstrelsy. The pen of a layman may not follow the privileged pen of a divine in the description of Belzebub's gambols, nor venture to record the name of the tune to which his hags danced—it seems too characteristic of its author to be named here. Tradition could lend its aid to history in recording many other of Satan's adventures as a poet and a minstrel, the creation of which I shall not be so uncharitable as to impute, as some have

done, to devout men who wished to impress a salutary dread of the sinfulness of song and music on the minds of our ancestors. They were, however, far too surely rooted to be so easily shaken; and I am afraid the dread of the evil one being abroad in the dark neither lessened the number of midnight assignations, nor the amount of exhibitions in the parish church—when the youth of the district were found worthy of standing on that "bad eminence," the repentance stool.

The decline of song may be safely imputed to other causes than to the interference of religion with the sports and pastimes of the people. When the old Scottish poet sang of the wine which the working husbandman drank—of his slumbering during the mid-day warmth—and of his whole days of relaxation from toil, he drew a picture of ease and abundance for which we can find no parallel now. If happiness is another name for wealth, we are much happier since assiduous agriculture has extracted riches from the land, and the rapid evolutions of machinery have rendered every stream profitable, and added its immensity of power to the strength of man. But I am not one of those who think that current gold is human happiness, and that man is more blessed in proportion as his wants and his labours increase and multiply. When a man could with five days' work earn subsistence for seven, he was surely in a fairer way of being happy than when he has to work six days for the like purpose; and though his food came not from a foreign land, nor his clothing from a loom farther off than his parochial village, are we to suppose

him less comfortable than ourselves with our teas, and our spices, and our silks? It was in the days when man obtained his sustenance by moderate labour, and had frequent remissions from toil, that we may place the golden age of song; and surely our ancestors, if they had more patience than we, must have had more leisure too, when they could listen to the chanting of our long romances and the singing of our martial ballads. To rise with the summer sun and not wipe the sweat from our brow till he sets, as many have done and do, may go far to obtain men a good name for laborious industry; but there is no Muse which presides over bodily labour: and though one of these heathen ladies patronised the dance, none of them took the plough, or the loom, or the saw, or the axe, or the hammer under protection. The patriarchal households of our ancestors were favourable for song and tale: the farmer presided among his servants, and, zealous for the good name of his house, watched over them with paternal care; he blessed their meals, countenanced, as far as the strictness of his religious virtues would allow, the innocent amusements of the evening, and then embodying the picture of humble devotion which Burns has painted with so much simplicity and truth, dismissed his dependants to repose, and was the last who went to sleep. A labourer himself, he was an example of industry to others, while his wife presided over the whole department of in-door thrift and economy, the management of cheese and butter, the spinning of flax and wool, the dyeing and bleaching of her webs, and innumerable other nameless acts of

domestic alertness and care, which distinguished a peasant dame of old, and were summed up under the name of household virtues. That we can find many such firesides now, I am well aware; but I am also aware that there are few now, compared to what there were within my own remembrance; and that they are becoming rarer every day. I shall be told, in answer to all this, that the new spirit which has arisen has cultivated our waste fields and clothed them with grain, removed our thatched houses with their floors of earth, and replaced them with mansions with slated roofs, ornamented ceilings, and carpeted floors; that our farmers' dames rustle in silks instead of linsey woolsey, and instead of singing to the running brooks

A music sweeter than their own,

they sing to the music of a piano-forte, and admonish their maidens in the good set speech of England; that their husbands spur their hunting nags, or drive their curricles; and that seated apart from the more vulgar portion of their household, in a parlour hung with family portraits, and with a figured carpet under their feet, they wonder at the simplicity and lowliness of their fathers. I admit this, and much more; but I deny that we are wiser, or better, or happier than we were. Wiser we are not—since we have made our vanity conspire to injure us: by the love of richer dresses, more delicate meals, and softer beds, we have entailed endless labour to support us in these luxurious delights, which, once tasted, cannot be given up. Better we are not—since

pride has separated the farmer from his dependents, placed him at the head of another table than his ancestors presided at, and made him forget those daily and devout ordinances which impressed a religious feeling on all the hearts of his establishment. And happier we are not—since the endless subdivisions of labour have made us more dependent—since all desire to be partakers of the luxuries which the fortunate speculations of men bring within the reach of the lowly and the laborious—and since knowledge has opened its mid-day light on all ranks, which, like the ray of Heaven, that, as the poet feigns, flashed into Hell, serves only to discover the miserable plight to which the half of mankind are reduced, to be the slaves of the other half. Change of condition, increase of knowledge, the calling in of machinery to the aid of human labour, and the ships which whiten the ocean with their passing and repassing sails, wafting luxuries to our backs and our tables, are all matters of delight to the historian or the politician; but of sorrow to the poet, who delights in the primitive glory of a people, and contemplates with pain all changes which lessen the original vigour of character, and refine mankind till they become too sensitive for enjoyment. Man has now to labour harder and longer—to shape out new ways to riches and even bread, and feel the sorrows of the primeval curse, a hot and sweaty brow, more frequently and more severely than his ancestors: all this is uncongenial to the creation of song and to its enjoyment—to its creation, where many of our finest songs have been created; and to its enjoyment, where it was

long and fondly enjoyed—among the peasantry of Scotland.

Besides all this, in the times of the ancient church, the festivals and fasts were numerous, and lax in observance; the saints, a legion in number, had each his annual period of honour, and the laity were indulged with much leisure for enjoyment. The fasts of the presbyterian church are few in amount, and strictly observed: and the sabbath gives not as of old its morning to the service of Heaven, and its afternoon to augment the pleasure and minister to the joys of mankind. Let not my presbyterian brethren imagine me desirous of revelling once more in the enjoyments which the thick-coming saints' days of the calendar present, or believe that my faith is different from their own, when I wish that all the days of man were not devoted to labour and religion. In the devoutest era of the presbyterian kirk, I am not sure that the sabbath was so strictly observed as it is now: it was at a Sunday foot-ball match that the death of Sir John Carmichael, the Scottish Warden, was plotted, in 1600; and in still earlier times, we find the heads of the church remonstrating against the representation of plays on Sunday. I defend not this breach of decorum, but I feel that in those days there was a desire for amusement and pleasure abroad; that man had more leisure for laughter than now; and that, during intermission from labour and frequent holidays, the Muse, whether merry or grave, was worshipped earnestly at the cottar's hearth and in the baron's hall.

Man's increase of wisdom, and the dread which knowledge has inspired of appearing to sanction what wit accounts absurd or ludicrous, have conspired against his ease, since they have banished annual processions, regular pastimes, fixed periods of feasting and dancing, and substituted labour, either bodily or mental, in their place. I confess it is impossible to survey, without a smile of pity or contempt, the annual exhibitions of our corporations, with stately steps and idle banners: and we are apt to extend the same scorn or commiseration to processions in which our nobles and our princes appear. It is impossible not to feel to the fullest the folly of such pageantry: here our knowledge steps in between us and our joy, and follows us with the grave diligence of Mentor on the steps of Telemachus, to rob us of pleasure, and poison the delicious cup which laborious folly has filled for us. We are grown too wise to be pleased with idle pageants, and too fond of variety, perhaps, to be long pleased with aught. We have tasted the luxuries of all quarters of the earth, and we love no longer the simple fare of our forefathers. All things change—we blush at the indelicate ballads which delighted our grandmothers; and the conversation of old queens, and the love-letters of old princes, are too free and too impure for the sylphs of the saloon in the theatre or the gods of the gallery. A thousand old observances, a thousand curious ceremonies, involving the manners and customs of our ancestors, are dead or dying away: the carousal which welcomed in the new year, the fires at Beltane, the mysteries and revelry of Hal-

low-eve, the festival at the shearing of the flocks, at the harvest-home, and many others, all times of song and mirth, have lost their olden spirit, and have either fallen into disuse, or are become like a saint's day—a mere mark in the calendar. I remember the enthusiasm with which the young, and the graver pleasure with which the old, would assemble on the return of an ancient day of jubilee; and the stories which were told, the songs which were sung, and the characters which were present, would form altogether a curious dramatic picture, and deserve the hand of Wilkie or Allan. The influence of such meetings, sanctioned by the presence and participation of age, had a great effect upon the youth of the district, and preserved an image of ancient manners, and was a kind of initiation into the mysteries and beliefs and feelings of their ancestors. I shall be told that it is well that all such foolish or superstitious observances are vanished, or vanishing, and that it is time to look at things by the light of wisdom, instead of by the dark lantern of ignorance. I am not sure that such light is in all things beneficial. It would be the same to Hamlet or Mac Ivor, if we could prove that the armed phantom and the gray shadow which appeared to them, and made such fearful revelations, were mere imaginings, or spirits of sticks and straw; the effect would be the same to the prince and to the chief; but what would be the effect on us? It would destroy the charm which the supernatural has diffused through those productions. The acute, and examining, and doubting genius of this age has unpeopled the green hills of their fairies,

the wild glens of their ghosts, and midnight of all its trains of phantoms and "grim features" which descended to us with the oral histories and religious creeds of our ancestors. That laborious and domesticated goblin, Brownie, no longer thrashes the corn with his shadowy flail, sups with supernatural glee the reward of curds and cream, and crosses a flooded river on the errand of a lady about to become a mother. Witchcraft no longer turns the milk of a thousand cows into blood—nor interposes between the father and his hopes of an heir, like the spells which impeded the delivery of "Willie's Ladye"—nor holds unbidden carousal on the wine of Brabant, and transforms ragworts or rustics into steeds and palfreys, to carry hags on their unhallowed errands. Ten thousand influences have passed away, and all the pomp of poesie, which embellished and made them acceptable, has departed in their train.

It would have been well had wisdom while it purified popular belief of the grosser portions of its creed, like the reformers when they broke the images of the papal church, allowed the rest of the superstructure to stand. But the spring-fire which destroys the furze destroys also the nests of a thousand song-birds; and the peasant, who goes a trouting with lime, leaves nothing alive in the stream. I wish that wisdom had spared us some few harmless and poetical beliefs. I could wish, for instance, to have the dread of a visitation from the grave, like Johnson; to have so much fear of the spiritual world left as would make me, while travelling during the night, keep a sharp look-out on suspicious places,

like Burns; and I would wish, more than all, to have upon me a feeling, between joy and fear, when wandering among the wild hills by moonlight, lest I should happen to hear the unearthly minstrelsy of the fairies, and see them coming in procession over the earth, a peasants saw, or imagined they saw, of old. But if I can spare the presence and the inspiration which more or less accompanied these beliefs, I can less afford to spare the poetical impulse which they gave to human thought—the wild and imaginative colouring which they shed upon our language—the images which they suggested, and the illustrations which they supplied. That we owe to them much of our romantic poetry, there can be little doubt: they have left their indelible impressions every where among our early ballads. That we owe to them much of that poetical elevation of thought and expression which distinguishes our peasantry, I could show with little leisure, and in little space, since the dream of superstitious belief has not yet wholly passed away.

I imagine I can perceive already in the conversation of the peasants of the lowlands of Scotland the effects of the vanishing of this long and acceptable vision of the phantoms of old belief. The stream has dried up, or ceased to flow, and the bed over which it meandered is rugged and unsightly. A poetical and imaginative people nursed these old beliefs in spite of their education and the light which learning shed: while their southern neighbours, having less imaginative power, and much less knowledge, dismissed them as idle and unprofitable

encumbrances. Much of the richness of illustration, much of the poetical strength of expression, has left us; and what was accounted the fittest food for the Muse is charmed away from her lips by the magic-wand of adventure, invention, and discovery. To a shepherd's way of life, poetry may be supposed to have little to add, since his whole existence seems poetical; yet when the arrows of the elves, and the spells of the witches, were broken or destroyed, the poetical part of sheep-surgery departed also: he now consults the receipt-book, and seeks no longer to avert or cure the evil which has fallen on his flock by the poetry of charms or conjurations. The mariner, when he spreads his sail for a foreign shore, no longer purchases a favourable wind and a prosperous voyage from the witches of Lapland or Galloway; and though he whistles for the breeze when the sea is calm, he does so more through custom than from the hope of awakening the sleeping wind. The fisherman, when he dips his nets in the water, thinks not now of augmenting his draught of fish by warbling to his victims a charmed rhyme; and the cowherd, when he drives his cattle to the pasture, has forgot of late to regulate their movements, and protect them from the spells of witches, with a rod of rowan-tree. A horse-shoe is no longer nailed above the stable-door, as a charm against the entrance of mischievous beings; nor is an ox's head buried under the barn threshold, to ensure the coming of the corn unblighted to the flail. The maid dreads no more the influence of evil eyes over her gathering of cream, as the churn staff

ascends and descends amid the fragrant element; and the matron, as she bars her door at night, summons no more

Saint Bride and her brat,

and all other powers, in whose might her ancestors had belief, to protect her and hers from all manner of fiends and shapes in the service of Satan. These, and many other rural superstitions of a poetical nature, have melted away before the thaw of knowledge.

When the King of Ithaca was storm-bound and spell-bound by the ancient poet, maritime discovery had not laid down her charts, settled the longitude and latitude of the isles of the ocean, and given the inhabitants and productions a place in history; he was therefore at liberty to find land where he listed, and to people it with enchantresses and giants and winged fiends, since the critics could not turn to the last map and the latest voyage and cry, "This man confounds navigation, and pulls history by the nose." Our steps are regulated by the compass, and our motions by the quadrant; and the Muse has no nearer resting-place where she may indulge her inventions than on some few acres of untrodden snow, near the North Pole, around which she may yet see the marks of the feet of my townsman, Richardson. When the peasant stood on the hill-top, and looked to earth and sky as the sun sank, to discover the promise of to-morrow, he composed something like the rudiments of poetry as he remarked the colours of the clouds, and the amplified or decreased appearance of the hills, and deduced from the varied scene before him the certainty

of sunshine or rain. He sits at home now and consults his almanack. When time was computed by the sun's shadow, or by the evening lights, a shepherd, as he gazed on the stars and moon, composed a poem while he pondered out the hour: the bughting star, and the northern wain, and the plough, are all names fitted for rustic poetry; but they have slipped out of conversation now that a watch has usurped their office. Men had their lucky days on which they transacted business: a sailor was unwilling to weigh anchor on a Friday; and a family was sure to be overwhelmed with calamity and misfortune, had the heads of the house chanced to marry in May. Two magpies on the roof of a dwelling-house were ominous of a funeral in one county and of a wedding in another: a hare hirpling before a youth as he was on the way to his love, during the twilight, has made him pale, and induced him to break his tryste; while a shower of rain on a bridal procession has gone nearer to snatch the bride from the bridegroom's arms than all the address and cunning of his rivals. I have known men set down a corpse and wait till a cloud interposed between them and the sun before depositing it in the earth. Such a superstitious feeling is still recorded in English rhyme:

> Happy is the bride that the sun shines on,
> And happy is the corse that the rain rains on.

These and innumerable other remains of a curious and primitive people have been current in many men's

memories; and as they contain the very elements of poetry, there can be little doubt that poetry has suffered by their loss, and that man is become more of a machine —an instrument capable of cultivating a given quantity of ground—a spinning-jenny for preparing thread—a kind of military engine covered with plumes and scarlet, for demolishing towns and destroying the human species.

I have allowed the subject of song almost to sink in the flood of superstition; and though I am aware that many curious snatches of old beliefs are yet unmentioned which contributed to its diffusion and its fame, I shall leave them to the memories or imaginations of my readers, and proceed with the less visionary part of my introduction.

When we approach toward times either within the reach of history or traditional memory, many customs, and ceremonies, and oral institutions, and reliques of ancient things, all connected with and illustrative of song, present themselves at once, each claiming notice and precedence. After emerging from the ocean of civil and religious war which desolated Scotland and ended in the establishment of her liberties, we reach a period when song first began to claim and obtain the notice and protection of the public, and was gathered into a safer sanctuary than oral remembrance. It is much to be lamented that more was not done—that along with the reliques of our lyric verse some collection had not been made of those dramatic ballads which formed a part of the rustic interludes or plays, accompanied with a clear and graphic account of en-

tertainments of which some vestiges are still visible. Some of these may be reproached with being indelicate, others with being vulgar, and some with being profane; but unsuited as they might be to the taste of the present age, they would have presented a rich and accurate picture of other times, and assisted in explaining many dark passages in tradition, in poetry, and history. Along with these we should have had the domestic history of our peasantry when, laying aside the spear and shield, they sought to amuse and entertain themselves, like all people on the way to refinement, with pursuits which united bodily exercise with mental; we should then have seen those mixed audiences which had the good taste and the patience to listen to the long martial ballad of the Douglas and Percy, which moved Sir Philip Sidney like the sound of a trumpet; we should have seen our rude and simple ancestors seated at their hearths, with their weapons of war and the chase grouped on the rough walls, and the chimney hung with the produce of sea and shore, while around a blazing fire the tale and the song abounded. All this, and much more than this, may be gathered from oral recollection, and from the existing condition of the people in the pastoral districts; but Fancy must be indulged in eking together these fragments of departed and departing things, and though a pleasant companion, she is an unsafe historian.

The customs, amusements, and beliefs, which our ancestors connected with song, were many and curious, and claim the attention of all who would learn the hi-

story of our lyric poetry. Song is found mingled with our joys and with our sorrows, with our labour and with our devotion: it speaks sometimes with a heathen, and often with a Christian tongue; often lends its aid to beliefs dark and mystical, and illustrates as an active and visible agent some custom or pastime yet living among the peasantry. Song followed the bride to the bridal chamber, and the corpse when folded in its winding-sheet,—the hag as she gratified her own malicious nature with an imaginary spell for her neighbour's harm, and her neighbour who sought to counteract it; even the enemy of salvation solaced, according to a reverend authority, his conclave of witches with music and with verse. The soldier went to battle with songs and with shouts; the sailor, as he lifted his anchor for a foreign land, had his song also, and with song he welcomed again the reappearance of his native hills. Song seems to have been the regular accompaniment of labour: the mariner dipped his oar to its melody; the fisherman dropped his net into the water while chanting a rude lyric or rhyming invocation; the farmer sang while he consigned his grain to the ground; the maiden, when the corn fell as she moved her sickle; and the miller had also his welcoming song when the meal gushed warm from the mill. In the south I am not sure that song is much the companion of labour; but in the north there is no trade, however toilsome, which has banished this charming associate. It is heard among the rich in the parlour, and among the menials in the hall: the shepherd sings on his hill, the maiden as she milks her

ewes; the smith sings as he prepares his welding-heat; the weaver as he moves his shuttle from side to side; and the mason, as he squares or sets the palace stone, sings to make labour feel lightsome, and the long day seem short. Even the West India slaves chant a prolonged and monotonous strain while they work for their task-masters; and I am told they have a deep sense of sweet music, and no inconsiderable skill in measuring out words to correspond with it.

Songs invoking the presiding spirit or patron saint of wells and waters, for the cure of men and cattle, were once common; and if any authentic specimen could be obtained now, it would make a valuable addition to our lyrics. Many such wells, and pools, and lakes, were scattered among our hills and vales; and to them, mostly on the first morning of May, the peasantry flocked far and near, for the sake of healing the sick or the maimed with a drink from the charmed water as the day dawned. A short hymn or song expressive of faith in the virtue of the spring, and of hope of health in the sick person, was first chanted, and then the pilgrims knelt down and lapped the water from their hands. It was unusual, or subversive of the charm or the virtue of the water, to drink it from a cup, unless the cup happened to be a blessed one, such as the pious of old always had in store for opulent pilgrims. When a cure was performed, and tradition says many were, the crutches of the lame, and a garment of the sick, were presented as an offering, and laid on the margin of the water, or suspended from the boughs of a neighbouring tree; and this too was gene-

rally accompanied by a religious chant. On the brink of many wells in Dumfriesshire and Galloway, ribbons, and other little articles of female finery, have been seen by people yet living, fastened so as to wave over the spring, the offerings of mothers for the recovery of their children; and several of the wells yet bear the name of the guardian saint, and stories of the cures they wrought of old are still current in the country. Some of the richer pilgrims expressed their faith or their gratitude by dropping a coin of silver, and sometimes gold, into the well; and when it was known that any one who abstracted the offerings was instantly punished with the infirmities of those who made them, we may suppose they were untouched by all whose fears were too strong for their cupidity. A piper, it is said, once stole an offering made by a luxurious laird in Galloway, and was instantly admonished of his folly by a severe fit of the gout.

The virtues of many other wells were of a less limited nature, in which case their ability to cure particular ailments was ascertained by a very sure and simple experiment. A garment from the body of the ailing person was carried to the well and laid on the surface of the water, while a superstitious hymn or invocation was sung. If the garment sank before the song was done, the well refused its aid; but if it floated, the recovery of the person was certain; and the virtue of the water must have been great which floated the massy dresses of our ancestors. In this way, also, the recovery of horses and cows afflicted with any malady was tried,

and a bridle of the one, or a piece of cloth which had touched the other, was generally used, and their sinking or swimming depended much on the dexterity of the messenger. The virtue of a certain well was so great, that on one occasion it floated a horse-shoe: a rival spring sought to eclipse its sanctity by floating a pound of butter. I never but once had the good fortune to hear one of those hymns: it had been chanted on the recovery of a young woman, when a snood of silk was suspended over the spring that cured her. It was a rude rhyme, yet it had a sound unlike that of any other lyric to which I had ever listened. I have endeavoured in vain to remember any part of it, for I heard it recited as a curiosity when I was very young; but since I cannot give the exact words, I will not run the risk of censure by substituting a version which might echo back the sound without the sense of the original.

Another superstition, of which song was frequently the offspring, was that of asking every evening the protection of some particular saint for the house, the inhabitants, the cattle in the fold, and the corn in the stack-yard. I am not sure that I should regard this as a superstition at all, but as the performance of a religious duty, a proof of domestic care, and perhaps the forerunner of that solemn family worship to which Burns with so much truth imputes the excellence of the national character. That it was performed in rhyme we have the testimony of an enemy, or, more correctly speaking, of a man who saw in it, not a relique of the old religion of the land, but an instance of the power of

Satan on earth, and a recommendation of the household to his care and protection. The rhymes are indeed rude, and speak of the saints whose patronage was sought with a familiarity without example now, but perfectly consistent with the character of our ancestors.

Who sains the house to-night?
They that sain it ilka night.
Saint Bryde and her brat,
Saint Colme and his hat,
Saint Michael and his spear,
Keep this house from the weir.

At the period when such lyrical prayers were popular, it required the strong protection of a military saint to save a house from being herried by the borderers, who, when they put their feet into the stirrup to make a foray into Scotland or England, chanted a rhyming prayer, which was never uttered perhaps without some honest person being the poorer for it before morning.

He that ordained us to be born,
Send us mair meat for the morn:
Come by right, or come by wrang,
Christ, let us never fast owre lang,
But blythely spend what's gaily got—
Ride, Rowland, hough's i' the pot.

But to follow song through all the capricious windings of superstition would require more knowledge than I

possess, and more patience than is usually the lot of those who seek information about such light matters. I cannot, however, avoid noticing the metrical charms which were once commonly sung on many occasions, by which man brought, or imagined he brought, something of the influence of both worlds, of good and evil, to the assistance of his labours or his designs. Thus the weird sisters in Macbeth sang as they filled their infernal caldron; and their short uncouth verses resemble the remains of some of our old lyrical incantations. Ben Jonson has imagined another hymn in the same singular spirit: and I remember to have heard a curious fragment of a similar character; but nothing remains on my memory save two lines:

Frog's foot and blood-stone,
Dog's pluck and herring-bone.

The witches of Lapland are said, by sailors, to conjure the winds into bags and bottles by means of song, and thus, through the aid of their lyrical skill, are enabled to bestow the blessing of a speedy voyage on our impatient mariners. When butter came with reluctance from the cream, it was, in ancient times, enticed or compelled to appear by the chanting of a charm; and I am not certain that such songs have wholly ceased to be used among the dames of the north.

Come, butter! come, come!
Come, butter, come!

Saint Peter's at the gate,
Waiting for my butter'd cake;
Come, butter! come, come!
Come, butter, come!

If the butter could resist such a melodious call as this, especially when seconded by the labour of the singer, ordinary industry might despair.

There is a kind of lyrical lament, or melancholy dirge, which was chanted by the mourners over the corpse while they laid it in the winding-sheet, and strewed such flowers and sweet herbs as the season yielded, that seems once to have made its way among the peasantry of England as well as of Scotland. It had not always, it is true, the same tone of sadness, and the same pathetic description of the attractions of the deceased, and the same hopes expressed for his future welfare, which would seem to be the natural character of such dirges. There was sometimes a note of mirth amid the sound of woe; and the solemn song which was chanted by the living at the side of the dead accorded not always with a voice from the tombs. In truth, the interval—and it was frequently a long one—which elapsed between the shrouding of the corpse and the interment, was often spent in feasting and carousing; and it is by no means an exaggerated picture of a house of death, which is painted by the old bard in the ballad of the Humble Beggar, "some were merry and some were sad, and some were blythe as blythe could be." The song or dirge often contained an exhortation to charity and be-

nevolence, and expressed the singular belief, that the deceased, in his way to bliss, would have to go through a doleful region of frost and snow—through an untrodden country full of thorns and briers, and finally have to pass over a bridge, which, springing from the earthly side of a dark flood, reached only to the middle of the stream. On his way, however, all the good deeds he had done in life came to help him in this perilous journey: the clothes which he had given to the naked covered him as he went through the region of frost; the shoes which he had bestowed in alms found their way to his own feet in the desert of briers and thorns; and when he came to the broken bridge, the spirits of the just whom he had befriended bore him, not without dipping his feet in the dismal stream, to the celestial side. The Mahometans seem to share in the same belief when they imagine that all the pieces of paper which believers pick up will come of their own accord and interpose between their naked feet and the ploughshares of red hot iron over which they have to pass into paradise. The lyke-wake dirge in the Border minstrelsy, a rude but impressive chant, expresses a similar feeling, and induces us to grieve that no more of these superstitious lyrics have been preserved.

Though the lyke-wake songs have ceased, we may easily recognize, in the prayer which is offered up before the mourners move the body from the house, the same train of thought, the same feeling, which those lyrics expressed, sobered down and modified to suit the simpler worship of the presbyterians. I have often been struck

with awe when the body was laid on the bier, when the mourners had taken their places, and the women had subdued their feelings into a tear and a sob, to see some venerable man uncover his gray hair, and, placing himself at the head of the coffin, offer up a prayer of resignation and condolence. The prose of the old man's prayer was more poetical than the rhymes of the lyke-wake lyrists; and I am far from sorry that such unseasonable examples of our national love of song have long ago ceased. I am free to confess that I never heard the language of the lowlands of Scotland so graceful, so pure and impassioned, as I have heard it from a peasant's lips as he prayed by the side of his ancient comrade and fellow-labourer, laid out in linen, cold and senseless, and about to be borne to the grave. All the grosser parts of the language sank as the feeling of his loss took possession of him; and if ever I could say that I listened to what I might imagine akin to inspiration, it was when I heard prayers uttered near the bed of sickness and the bier of death.

The consideration of song carries me to scenes less grave or mysterious than those which I have sought to sketch; where, if superstition mingle, her looks are less dark; and if sadness intrude, it is but for an instant, like the wings of the raven passing between us and the sun. Among the many topics on which human belief chose to employ song, one of the most curious was that of the intercourse which the powers of pleasure and mischief had established between mankind and the fairies. That diminutive and poetic race with which human be-

lief has not yet wholly ceased to tenant our northern hills and dales were willing at times to show themselves among men, and exchange mutual courtesies and deeds of kindness. In many of their benevolent actions was a mixture of elfin mischief; yet when they went about any serious wickedness, they had a kind of unearthly glee and capricious good-humour about them, which more than half atoned for the arrows which they shot among the flocks, and for the exchanges which they sometimes made of their own dwarfish progeny for the children of men. In whatever deed they were employed, music and mirth accompanied them, and still their speech was song. The music which the lady of Tamlane heard, and the wonderous procession which she saw, had been heard and seen by others of the maidens of Caledonia: and among the many tales which lent wings to the winter evenings, the most pleasant and the most poetical were those which described the midnight processions of the Fairies, the charms of their minstrelsy, the beauty of their songs, the splendour of their palaces hidden in the bosoms of the green hills, and the life of joy which they led riding under the new-risen moon or wandering among the abodes of men, concealed by the power which they had of becoming invisible when they chose. The impulse which this beautiful and diminutive race gave to our lyric poetry may be traced through many of our earlier compositions; and if we regard them as the mere creatures of the popular imagination, then we may take their character, and the actions ascribed to them, as a very lively specimen of

the wild and romantic spirit which distinguished our ancestors. The firm assurance and belief which the peasantry had, and have, in their existence, can only be known by those who have an intimate acquaintance with the cottagers of Caledonia. In every green hill they are believed to have fixed their abode; in every solitary and beautiful turn of a mountain stream, they have been seen dancing and making all the glen resound with their mirth; and in every wild and picturesque and seldom-frequented path, they have been observed in all the pride of equestrian procession, hurrying along to the music of many instruments. I confess I cannot see in the character and in the actions imputed to this poetic race any very close resemblance to the imps and satyrs of other countries; but if the belief were an imported one, we have made it our own by the way we have dressed it out in the Scottish costume of poetical superstition.

If the songs and minstrelsy of the Fairies communicated none of their own aerial spirit to the popular poetry, still the general belief in their existence and their influence served to keep up the more ethereal part of the spirit of song. All that pertains to them and every attribute bestowed on them, and all the actions which the caprice of popular fancy has imputed to them, are purely and essentially poetical. They never performed menial drudgeries, like the Brownie, for the sake of lying stretched out all the chimney length, and supping curds and cream by the warmth of the midnight embers: nor had they the gross and sensual pre-

pensities of the witches, whose inspiration served only to degrade them in vulgarity below the rest of mankind; nor were they humbled into the form of an animal, like the Kelpie; nor doomed to drag a fish's train, like the Mermaid: their shapes and their pursuits were stamped with the character of a generous and an elegant superstition. If popular belief makes them exchange at times their own progeny for the children of men, it imputes no cruel motive for the deed; and if they are charged with falling in love with handsome youths and beautiful maidens, and with carrying them away to Fairy-land, they only interposed between them and sudden death or lingering sorrow, and saved those who were doomed to an early grave. It happened when I was a child, that a neighbouring gentleman was returning from a fair with his only son, a fine youth, some seventeen years old: within call of his house was a brook, which in summer-time a child four years old might wade, but which now, augmented by a thunder shower at the head, came down deep and broad; and being somewhat of a mossy stream, the increase of its waters made no great increase of its sound. The night was dark, and when the father reached the opposite bank of the brook his son's horse was by his side, but the saddle was empty. Instant search was made, but the body of the youth was nowhere to be found. Soon after, it happened that the young man's sister was returning home along the bank of the same stream: it was about the twilight, and she had reached the fatal ford, when her brother suddenly appeared and addressed her. She felt no alarm, she

said, for he had the same sweet kind look which he ever had to her, and his voice was not altered. He told her he was not drowned, as had been supposed, but was carried into Fairyland, and allowed to revisit the earth but once every moon. When he fell from his horse he was caught before he reached the water, and borne away as if he had been carried on wings, and laid down in a wild glen in the middle of a meeting of fairies, who were all seated on the grass, listening to a new song; he was hailed as one redeemed from drowning, clothed with a green mantle and placed on a white horse; and a fairy, passing her hand over his face, bade him look, for he was among friends: and he looked, and saw the faces of many men who were supposed to have fallen in battle or perished at sea, and one of them was his own uncle, whose ship had sunk in the Solway with all its mariners aboard. Yet he wished not, he said, to dwell away from his father's house, and from a sister whom he tenderly loved; and though he could not return of himself, he might be won back by a dauntless and intrepid spirit. On the first night of the moon he would be one of a troop of fairies who would pass by the parish kirkyard, and the mark he would be known by was a cornpipe, on which he was to play; and the tune he would play was the one which his sister loved,—"Aye waking O?" He entreated her, if she wished to win him, to hide herself in the churchyard, and when the fairy train came by, to leap up and seize him, and claim him as a Christian in the name of God. All this she promised to do, but she had not the courage of the heroine of Carterhaugh;

for the fairy procession overcame her so much with supernatural terror, that she allowed her brother to go by without attempting his rescue. He was never again visible; but she heard him often, as the fairies rode past, singing with a mournful voice of his own unhappy fate and the love he bore his sister.

In the extensive credit which this wild story obtained we may see the desire that mankind has of imagining an intercourse with the other world, and also the feeling which never separates fairies from song. This might be exemplified in a thousand wild traditions—and tradition in a matter of this kind is a much safer guide than the conjectures of the learned and the creations of poets, whose genius had received a colouring from classic superstition. They are apt to see every thing with Greek or Latin eyes, and desire to look in the mythology of the ancients for the gloomy gods and sportive elves of the north. I shall not, however, attempt to follow my subject through all the winding vistas of common belief, but proceed to examine some of those old customs and amusements where song was often the chief pleasure, and always a welcome auxiliary.

By those intimately acquainted with the manners and customs of the peasantry, something like the remains of a rude drama—a representation uniting the fourfold qualities of acting, dancing, music, and song—must have been often observed at weddings, at harvest-homes, and other festivities. To me it has appeared under three different forms; and a brief description of each may recal similar rustic attempts at dramatic representation

to many of my northern readers. The first I saw was called "The Wooing of the Maiden," a favourite pastime at the close of a wedding feast, and indeed it seemed designed as a humorous portraiture of the vicissitudes of courtship. When dancing and carousal had quickened up the spirits of the wedding guests, and just before the time of stocking-throwing, the door of the barn was opened, and a youth and maiden entered, keeping time to the sound of the fiddle which commenced the air that gave a name to the entertainment. The youth was a lively peasant with no small share of inventive humour, and dressed in the extremity of the fashion; while the damsel personated with very good grace a fantastic old maid, flourishing in ancient finery, with a sharp shrill voice and a look of great importance. They advanced to the middle of the floor beating time to the tune, and smiling upon each other, and mimicking the appearance of delight and joy. This pantomime having lasted some five minutes, the maiden sang part of a song adapted to the music, which praised the charms of opulence, and laid the scene of domestic love and endearment among bags of gold, in the middle of many acres, and concluded with extolling the wisdom and discretion of age. This was answered by a song from her lover, which, with the usual enthusiasm of youth, spoke with great contempt of charms which were rated by the acre—of attractions which were weighed by gold; and laid the scene of true love endearment at the time when maidens step out of their teens. As the charms of the rustic actress happened to be far from considerable, and as she had in

all appearance overstepped her teens a good score of years, she considered this lyric declaration of her lover as somewhat personal, and proceeded to resent it in very passable pantomime.—She strode round the floor with the stride of an ogress, and shivered all her finery with anger and pride as a fowl ruffles its feathers. Her lover seemed by no means desirous of soothing her; he mimicked her lordliness of step, and the waving of her mantle, and stepped step by step with her and the music round the floor. He then took an empty purse out of his pocket, shook it before her face, threw it into the air and caught it as it fell, and burst out into another verse of song in contempt of riches and all who possessed them. This was answered by a corresponding verse from the maiden, in which she laughed at empty pockets, and scorned poverty, in the way the world has ever done. He then turned from her in great anger. And now began the more dramatic part of the entertainment: he danced round the company, and having singled out a young woman, the most beautiful he could find, he saluted her, took her hand, danced with her into the middle of the floor, and made earnest love as far as the silence of pantomime would allow. This excited the anger and jealousy of the other; and as the nature of the dance required the music still to be obeyed by the feet, we had a very good dance; a very good song from the slighted lady, in scorn of her landless rival; a song in reply from the other, vindicating the supremacy of youth and beauty against the influence of moorlands and meadows; and, finally, a verse from the hero of the

entertainment, rejoicing in the choice of his heart in opposition to that of avarice. This kind of contest continued some time—one moment limited to pantomime, and the next breaking out into satiric verse: it ended, however, as all contests of that kind generally do, in the triumph of her of the houses and land, and with her success the representation terminated. I may add, that I have seen it acted without the assistance of song, and that the addition of the verse, though a great improvement by lending voice to action, impeded the operations of the dance and rendered it subordinate.

The next pastime of this kind which I shall notice seemed to be a dramatic presentation of a contest between Idleness and Industry, between Waste and Thrift, and gave its name to, or took it from the well-known air of "The Roke and the wee pickle tow." It is commonly acted at one of those carousals called harvest-kirns, and commences by the musician playing the air which introduces to the floor and to the audience a staid and thrifty-looking dame, with a roke or distaff in her bosom replenished with flax, from which she twines or seems to twine thread. She is joined in the dance, but not in the industry, by a joyous, middle-aged man, somewhat touched, it may be, with liquor: he holds a candle in his hand, and dances with her round the floor, beating accurate time all the while to the music. He of the candle sings a verse to the air of the music, in which he laughs at thrift, and counts industry a colder companion than pleasure. She of the roke replies to this, and tells him in song that idle pleasure ends in sorrow

and repentance, while homely industry brings peace and happiness, and shuts the door on pain and on poverty. The music, played purposely slow for the sake of the song, bursts out more boldly, and the dance, like that of the witches in Tam O'Shanter, grows fast and furious; for the man endeavours to set the roke on fire with his candle, while the woman eludes him with great activity, and all the while the music and the feet echo to each other. This contest continues for the space of five minutes or more, and then they renew the bickerings between idleness and thrift in satiric song. On the side of Industry, many proverbs pressing the necessity of thrift are woven into verse, while all the curious sayings which ridicule labour, and paint pleasure lying idle among beds of lilies, are at the command of him who would have been the "Unthrift" in one of the old moralities. Fire prevails however at last against its combustible opponent, and the pleasure of the audience is measured by the duration of the strife; for it requires no small management and agility to preserve the "Roke and the wee pickle tow" amid the evolutions of the dance. This dramatic entertainment, I understand, is sometimes represented without song, and it is not at all improbable that it forms only a portion of some more important performance.

I have already elsewhere in this wandering introduction anticipated the account of the third description of the rustic drama—a Nithsdale interlude, acted on many occasions of festive merriment, and known by the name of "Auld Glenae." I have little doubt that this comic,

but not over reverent interlude, was originally intended for two persons, one the sinner, and the other a professor of the kirk; and that the humour of the whole was sustained by the assumed gravity of admonition and rebuke on the one hand, and the arch simplicity of the transgressor on the other; the whole being intended to ridicule the inquisitorial scrutiny of the kirk session into all offences against chastity. The reverend actor is omitted in modern representation, and the humour of the piece is entirely supported by the delinquent, a man whose hoary hair and age-bent frame almost give an answer to the charge. I have seen it performed before a rustic audience with applause: but I believe it has now, along with all similar entertainments, fallen into disuse or discredit. I love so well whatever gives us an image or a notion of the character and pursuits of our ancestors, as to wish that the remains of all matters of this nature were collected by a curious hand and preserved for posterity.

The condition of the bulk of the Scottish population was in itself favourable for the production and continuance of song; and long after the minstrels were forgotten, many of the peasantry, without perhaps any skill in music, supplied their place in the recitation of romances, in the chanting of ballads, and in the singing and sometimes in the creation of songs. Such men I remember—a kind of district historians, who had a tale for every hill, and a song for every stream, and a proverb for every casualty in human life and affairs. They knew the history of each family, and the characters

of the living and the dead; they could see in a rising name the fulfilment of some ancient prophecy, and in the sinking of another that some long treasured-up curse was coming to pass. At the hearth where they were seated for the evening were gathered many of the youths and many of the maidens of the district, and songs and tales and anecdotes abounded till midnight. They had grave stories for the grave, and gay songs for the gay; nor when the cups were moving and the maidens away did they want some of those free and characteristic strains which abounded when the kirk sought to chasten song by means of the "Godlie Ballats." I claim for these parochial poets neither the name of minstrel nor the importance of the art. But if they communicated none of the lofty, buoyant, and elegant spirit to verse which the minstrels are supposed to have supplied, they certainly brought a naïveté and rustic skill, a freshness and originality of thought, and maintained that lively dramatic cast of composition which has given so much spirit to northern song. If they had not the outward look, nor came in the pomp and circumstance of the ancient lyric professors, neither were they rewarded with chains of gold, and embossed cups, and costly dresses. The payment they received was more agreeable to their vanity than to their avarice, and the world grew daily more penurious; for I once heard a person of this description declare that Nithsdale was for him half-a-crown a week worse than when he first knew it.

Another source of song may be found in those evening meetings, or trystes, which for various purposes of

pleasure or thrift are still popular in the lowlands. They took their name from the purpose for which they were assembled; and they originated probably in that spirit of good-fellowship and mutual obligation which scripture enjoins, and which our early presbyterian divines pressed so anxiously on their flocks. The pursuits of pastoral or rural life present, it is true, no meetings of rank or of opulent beauty, and no dignified labours, such as beseem knighthood and may be worthy of the courtly Muse. To card wool, and spin yarn, and acquit themselves in the pressing labours of domestic life, are matters which have a mean sound, and may seem no very elegant work for those who infused fresh feeling and new spirit into Scottish song. Nevertheless, our assertion is true, and we have the authority of Burns to support us if any support were needed. It was at a "Roking" on Fastern's E'en where he first heard the song of old Lapraik; and at similar meetings I have not only heard new songs of merit introduced, but curious variations of old ones sung, and very clever opinions expressed on their merits. To such meetings we owe many variations which we have in ballad and in song, which change the sentiment, and alter the narrative, and remove the heroine of the old bard to make room for some district beauty.

To the sharp encounter among the provincial wits we also owe many curious and felicitous interpolations, humorous or sarcastic, of which several examples might be given. The great excellence of all such changes is not so much the new turn which they give to the

song, as the way in which they are wrought into the narrative, and seem to be as natural as a new bough is to a tree. In these meetings it would be idle to seek for that refinement of expression and courtliness of sentiment which public taste demands now; and yet, amid the rudest of our strains, we have touches of natural delicacy, and verses of as exquisite grace of expression, as are to be found in the more elaborate compositions of the Muse. Talk, it is true, intervened; and stories and mirth interposed to prevent the evening from becoming tedious by the repetition of lyrics, many of which were old and well known; and episodical passages of love or recognition would assist in adding variety to the domestic picture, and contribute some of those characteristic charms which a painter uses in emblazoning as with national heraldry the main object of his composition. Still, however, song was one of the chief spells which called the meetings together, and the genius of the rustic Muse was not more brought into action than the natural good taste and the sweet and exquisite voices of some of the maidens in singing. Scottish song in meetings such as these, I am free to confess, and willing to endure the pity of scientific performers for acknowledging, had charms for me which have never been equalled by the more skilful and more accurate warblings of some of the most popular singers in our theatres. There may be some nationality in this, but there can be no mistake in the feeling which the rustic or learned performers excited. I am willing to find a reason for it in the very nature of our northern lyrics. When we hear one of our simple songs full

of domestic and humble love, and illustrated with the imagery supplied by rustic life, warbled amid a multitude of people rustling in the richest dresses, and sparkling in gold and jewels, and diffusing an odour which the united fragrance of several regions produces, we are struck with the singular dissimilitude, and think of the violation of time and place, and the utter want of keeping between the character of the song and the audience. But what perhaps is still more injurious to the full effect of the performance, is the departure of the singer from that style of expressive simplicity which echoes back to every bosom the sentiment and feeling of the words, and encumbers the air with a profusion of ornament which overlays the poetry. I may also add to this the circumstance of those who perform being, in some degree, obliged to sing to please a manager or an audience rather than their own fancy; and that the head rather than the heart is made to pour out the strain. With less practice and with less knowledge a country maiden will sing us one of the popular strains which the heart of Scotland has of old sighed out to a corresponding air, and selecting only what she feels, what seems to embalm some sentiment of her own, or presents to her eye some image of enjoyment or of sorrow which has been awakened in her own bosom, she will charm and elevate us by the heart and the passion with which she endows it. If we look around too while the song is singing, we shall see all nature, the hill, the vale, the stream, and the pastoral loveliness of the place, in strict union and keeping with the poetry, and forming a kind

of framework or historical accompaniment, such as Burns beheld on the robe of Ceila. Impressions as vivid as these have been frequently excited while I listened to the song of a maiden — herself yet unseen — coming winding and flowing among the broomy knolls and honeysuckled hollows of my native land; or when, accompanied by the shepherd's pipe, she

> Added her sweet voice to the lyric sound,
> And sang with much simplicity—a merit
> Not the less precious that we seldom hear it.

But there are dearer and tenderer meetings than the trystes for labour or for mirth, to which we owe the chief impulse to the composition of song, to which it is indebted for its purity, for its passion, and for all indeed that elevates it above the mere contention for bread, which man has to hold with the world. The passion of love, which many poets have sung and few sung well, infuses a poetic spirit into many minds and hearts, and compels them to burst out for relief into involuntary song. The great proportion of our lyrics presents this passion under all the varieties of pleasure or of pain which it inflicts on mankind. They contain a record of love adventures, often very wild, impressive, and romantic, rather than an exhibition of fine sayings and pointed sentiments. Sentiments, indeed, often lofty and generally tender and delicate, are found to mingle with the history of the midnight watchings and the joy of the stolen interviews. The youth—the peasant youth of

Scotland—are devoted servants to the fair, and their love adventures, amid a wild and picturesque country, during the storms of a winter or the gentleness of a summer night, encountering the wiles or the strength of rivals and the caprice of those whose love they seek, present abundant materials for poetry and romance. Many of our lyrics have been composed during these nocturnal excursions; and a wild night and a haunted road, a deep stream and a desert moor, stand in the way like so many impediments in the path of a knight errant of old, which it was meritorious and honourable to overcome. But the wild night and all the dangers of the way, natural or supernatural, are forgotten when the lover approaches the home of his mistress, and sees the warning light at her window, or meets her at the appointed place of tryste. And it may be well if to a warm heart and a persuasive tongue he adds a strong arm and good courage, for many a handsome maiden would think her charms unworthy of song if they brought but a solitary admirer. In humble life as well as in high, there is an archness and a coquetry which is soothed and gratified by variety of admiration. A maiden has been known to summon on a time her numerous lovers around her, among whom she presided for a whole evening, with comic gravity of satisfaction at the extent of her dominion, distributing her smiles and her glances in a way which bade all hope and none despair.

In the first outburst of young affection there is a poetic exaltation of heart and soul, a romantic enthusiasm, which invests its mistress with a beauty and a

loveliness which men of soberer spirits may not readily see in the original. When this enthusiasm is poured out in song, and the finest songs are perhaps the fruit of these first inspirations, men go in quest of the lady who performed the enchantment, and exclaim with Moore,

What an impostor genius is.

I believe in the influence of beauty over the Muse, and I imagine that in many of our songs I behold an express and modest image of many a Caledonian dame. But I have seen so much of the caprice of those spirits who enchant us with their songs, how they lavished all the allurements of verse and the choicest colours of nature upon very ordinary subjects, that I am almost induced to conclude that more of our best lyrics are prompted by women, on whom Dr. Johnson would have declared poesie had no charms to bestow, than I dare presume to name. He can indeed be no true poet who has not already enshrined in his heart and fancy diviner images of female beauty than nature readily supplies him with. He sits not down, like one about to make a portrait, to limn his mistress off; his pictures of beauty are aerial images of grace and loveliness conceived in his own fancy, and coloured more with the hues of heaven than of earth. By this rare faculty he hallows and ennobles all he chooses to touch, and endows ordinary forms and common minds with the shapes and riches of fancy. Much of this mistempered warmth is cooled as poets advance in life, and song is sobered down into domestic discretion

and matron-like mildness, and the austere composure of beauty.

But I have no need to seek in trystes or meetings of either love, or labour, or merriment, for the sources of song: a farmer or a cottager's winter fire-side has often been the theme and always the theatre of lyric verse; and the gray 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 dependants 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 hearthstone 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 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. Among them also are some of the elder worthies, divines, and graver poets of England: and if the productions of Wordsworth be not there, it is only because they have but lately come to a price within a prudent poor man's reach; for I know of no works more deeply impressed with the simple pathos and devout aspirations so dear to the peasantry of our land. If I add to these the sibylline leaves of song which the idle native Muses scattered so largely in the form that suited alike the plowman's pocket and purse, and which were again dispersed weekly, or rather daily, over the land, by a multitude of dealers in cheap tales and romances and ballads, I may say I have completed the picture of the "Goodman's" side of the house, and may turn myself to the other, where I left the mistress presiding among her daughters and menials.

Around the farmer's dame the evening has gathered all her maidens whom daylight had 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 burn-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 party-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.

From these and a thousand other sources of pleasure or seriousness our numerous lyrics have arisen, and it would be much more curious than useful to trace all the way-

ward steps of fugitive song, and draw with an exact and discriminating hand the changing character and varying condition of our peasantry. In a history of Scottish song, much must be decided by judicious conjecture, much must be gathered from the internal evidence of verse, much collected from an extensive knowledge of northern literature, and when all is found that exists, and all is arranged that research can supply or judgment suggest, there will yet be many chasms in the narrative, and many periods when the light of song is lost in darkness, or scarcely visible in eclipse. The current of song has not always been poured forth in an unceasing and continued stream: like the rivulets of the north, which gush out into rivers during the season of rain, and subside and dry up to a few reluctant drops in the parching heat of summer, it has had its seasons of overflow and its periods of decrease. Yet there have ever been invisible spirits at work, scattering over the land a regular succession of lyrics, more or less impressed with the original character of the people, the productions of random inspiration, expressing the feelings and the story of some wounded heart, or laughing out in the fullest enjoyment of the follies of man and the pleasant vanities of woman. From them, and from poets to whose voice the country has listened in joy, and whose names are consecrated by the approbation of generations, many exquisite lyrics have been produced which find an echo in every heart, and are scattered wherever a British voice is heard or a British foot imprinted.

Wherever our sailors have borne our thunder, our soldiers our strength, and our merchants our enterprise, Scottish song has followed, and awakened a memory of the northern land amid the hot sands of Egypt and the frozen snows of Siberia. The lyric voice of Caledonia has penetrated from side to side of the eastern regions of spice, and has gratified some of the simple hordes of roving Indians with a melody equalling or surpassing their own. Amid the boundless forests and mighty lakes and rivers of the western world, the songs which gladdened the hills and vales of Scotland have been awakened again by a kindred people, and the hunter as he dives into the wilderness, or sails down the Ohio, recalls his native hills in his retrospective strain. These are no idle suppositions which enthusiasm creates for national vanity to repeat. For the banks of the Ganges, the Ohio, and the Amazons, for the forests of America, the plains of India, and the mountains of Peru, or Mexico, for the remotest isles of the sea, the savage shores of the north, and the classic coasts of Asia or Greece, I could tell the same story which the Englishman told, who heard, two hundred years ago, the song of Bothwell Bank sung in the land of Palestine.

The darkest night will draw to day, and the longest introduction, whether to verse or prose, must come to a conclusion. The continued account of our song, and the critical examination of its excellences and its failings, will be mingled with the characters, which I now proceed to delineate, of the most eminent of our lyric

poets. I shall endeavour to speak as I feel; for all criticism resolves itself into that at last, and all rules are made from emotion, whether of pain or of pleasure. The poet makes the critic, not the critic the poet: he whose productions live longest and give the most pleasure is probably the greatest genius; and it is from what he makes men feel, that they make rules for measuring the genius of others. But each nation has an original spirit and power of its own, a way of attaining excellence in its own eyes, different in some degree from that of its neighbours; a manner of expressing its joys, its sorrows, its anger, or its fears, which marks it out among the nations; and of these peculiarities will its literature, if it be written with a free and unconstrained heart, more or less partake. I am therefore of opinion, that with a strict reference to a nation's peculiarities, all its works of genius should be judged. The women of Greece, if we may decide from the exquisite marbles which have escaped the barbarians, had a loveliness of another kind from that which distinguishes the beauties of Britain; but I feel as a Scotchman, and though I cannot but believe the women of the east to have been eminently lovely, I have no wish that the loveliness of this country should be less divine than it is. Genius is as a star that can only be examined by its own light.