JAMES THE FIFTH.

Our knowledge of the lyric genius of the Common's King we owe to tradition, which, mutable in many things, has been so consistent in this, that its words have become history. That he was the author of the Gaberlunyie-man there can be little doubt; and its companion, the Jollie Beggar, though less delicate, seems the offspring of the same mind and of the same train of thought. They are both productions of great merit—remarkable for their roguish humour and freedom of expression, and for their lively and drama-like presentation of character and story: they are strictly of that kind of poetry which I consider as the natural offspring of the soil—which owes nothing to classic lore, but is called into existence by some strong impulse, and wins its way to popular favour by reflecting a vigorous image of homely life. I must, however, suppose that these favourite songs owe some of their influence to the royal hand that wrote them. We imagine, while singing the songs of James Stuart, that we are singing of his adventures also: we see the gallant monarch, with his horn by his side and his belted knights near, in the Jollie Beggar; and in the Gaberlunyie-man, we think more of the monarch than of any of his subjects. I know not where to seek for a livelier picture of joy than is exhibited by the mother when "she danced her lane, and cried, Praise be blest;" or more real and ludicrous

naïveté than the surprise of the maiden when she imagined she had obliged a mendicant instead of the laird of Brodie.

It has been observed of these two ancient lyrics, that they give us gross and sensual pictures of life, and cannot well be read aloud without shame, or sung without a blush. To wish them otherwise than they are is either to wish they had never existed, or that they had uttered their wickedness with a holier tongue. That we wish such spots removed from the white garments of the Muse, is a proof that our taste is different from that of our ancestors; but no proof that we are right, and that they were wrong. The simplicity of former times, and the frank directness of conversation, allowed greater latitude of expression to the Muse. The daughter of Henry the Seventh permitted a poet of her husband's court to address her in a style of audacious freedom, which her son has not surpassed in his songs expressly dedicated to nocturnal adventure and rustic intrigue among the daughters of his subjects. The statue which our ancestors loved to see in simple and unattired beauty, we cannot look upon without drapery reaching from neck to feet.

Old times are changed, old manners gone.

Yet no change of manners, or evolutions of time, will much affect poetry which is founded in nature—and this makes the lyrics of the king as fresh and lively and intelligible as they were when they were composed.

ALEXANDER SCOTT.

Gay, and light, and elegant beyond most poets of his time, Alexander Scott sang with much more sweetness than strength, and was more anxious after the smoothness of his numbers than the natural beauty of his sentiments: he flows smooth, but he seldom flows deep; he is refined and delicate, but has little vigour and no passion. Yet his verses are exceedingly pleasing—they are melodious, with meaning in their melody, and possess in no small degree that easy and gliding-away grace of expression, of which the old minstrel vaunted:—

> Forbye how sweet my numbers flow,
>   And slide away like water!

In acknowledging the skill of Scott in lyric composition, and uniting with my friend David Laing in admiring the ease and happiness of his versification, I cannot be insensible that his songs, with all their elegance, have little of the romantic ardour of exalted love, or present, amid their grace and fluency, any very original or moving pictures of domestic life or enthusiastic attachment. The songs of James the Fifth and his subject, Scott, are as different in their nature as their reception has been with the world. The former, full of visible life and jollity and enjoyment, with life's-blood in them for a thousand years, have descended to us without any

loss of their original brightness, and still rival the works of more admired poets. The latter have already become half obsolete—are faded and gone, like the green huntresses in an ancient tapestry: they speak a language to which few hearts respond, and are consigned, in spite of all their polish and their melody, to the place over which oblivion reigns. It requires no divination to find out the cause of this: it is the triumph of vigorous nature over the polished dexterity of art—the upshot of that contest which sometimes takes place between a court beauty, "with patches, paint, and jewels on," and the easy and natural and becoming grace of some unconscious piece of country loveliness, whose beauty charms us by the very absence of the supplemental attractions of her rival. The one is encumbered by her finery, and is merely an auxiliary to the magnificence of her own dress; while the other moves in the freedom of nature, and all that is about her becomes her as much as light becomes the morning. Scott sometimes falls into a laboriousness of alliteration, like other poets of his time, but he never degenerates into allegory.—I wish his strength equalled his simplicity.

ALEXANDER MONTGOMERY.

Montgomery deserves more notice than he has obtained; he was long spoken of, but seldom read: and I am willing to believe that the fortunate abuse of Pinkerton contributed to his fame by arming in his behalf

all the lovers of old Scottish song. The cast of his genius is lyrical—there is a sweetness and a liquid motion about even his most elaborate productions, and one cannot easily avoid chanting many passages on perusal. His thoughts are ready, his images at hand, and his illustrations natural and apt. His language is ever flowing, felicitous, and abundant. His faults are the faults of the times.—Printing had opened the treasures of ancient lore; and all our compositions were speckled and spotted with classical allusions. He embalms conceits in a stream of melody, and seeks to consecrate anew the faded splendour of the heathen mythology. Such idle display of scholarship was less affected then than it would be now. To glance, as the stream of story flows along, at old glory and at ancient things, is very well when happily managed and not dwelt upon; but Venus can only come into courtships now to be laughed at, and the most reasonable god in all the mythology will abate rather than increase the interest of any living poet's song.

Montgomery could not resist the allurements of the scholastic Dalilah: he seems rather to have been inspired by books than moved into voluntary numbers by the silent influence of nature; and his learning overlays his better powers, as ground may be made unproductive by too much manure—the fatness spoils the seed which is sown. It was perhaps his misfortune that he was learned. He is fond of allegory, and more fond than fortunate in using it: like all those who give way to such puerile temptation, he becomes too dark to impart

pleasure, and too mystical for instruction. For the want of human interest—for the absence of the sons and daughters of men—no beauty of invention can atone: if beauty could bring readers, Montgomery scatters it with a ready and liberal hand.

He is full of chivalrous admiration of the ladies; and has put himself, for the love of the lady Margaret Montgomery, through a series of lyrical ordeals, from distant awe down to closer admiration, from vague fear to agony without hope. The elegant and varied praise with which he followed her was such as few ladies might withstand, if they ever allowed their hearts to be touched by the witchery of verse. But their prudence is proof against the magic of poetry: the flush of youth and the glow of health seek less ethereal delights than verse, and few young ladies are carried off their balance by the tide of song. I know not how the lady Margaret received or rewarded his homage; yet had he been successful, vanity could not have kept silence.

Montgomery has been praised, and justly, for the purity of his English; but his wish to write in a courtly and polished style made him wrong his natural powers. He had genius equal to the task of using his native language in a graceful and dignified manner: had he done this, his fate as a poet might have been widely different; it would indeed have confined his fame to Scotland, but the admiration of our native land may fill up the measure of a very respectable ambition. His enthusiasm for all that was beautiful and pure, and his sympathy in the scenery and characters and manners of his native land,

would then have flowed out in language such as would not readily perish. As he is, so must we take him. I have endeavoured to modernize several of his lyrics; and if I have had any success, it has been more owing to good fortune than meditation. Those who wish to taste the spirit of Montgomery, pure and unmingled, must go to my friend David Laing, whose beautiful and complete edition of the poet's works will enable them to drink at the fountain-head, and be refreshed.

SIR ROBERT AYTON.

Sir Robert Ayton, secretary to the Scottish queens Mary and Anne, is one of the fortunate poets who have obtained a reputation by one lucky or judicious effort—by obeying one of those vagrant fits of inspiration, which, like the flower of the aloe, comes but once in a lifetime to some, while to others, under a happier dispensation, they return as regular as the light of day. But he is well worthy of his fame, were it higher; for his song to a Forsaken Mistress is one of the sweetest and happiest of our early compositions. It has the singular merit of uniting natural elegance of language with originality of thought, and wholesome counsel with felicity of diction. We have the story of woman's levity, and of man's sympathy, related in a way which has been rarely equalled, and which must be felt by all who can feel for the modest dignity of offended love. It was on this song that Burns, with a superfluous sympathy,

bestowed a Scottish dress, and thought he had improved the simplicity. It was one of the least lucky of all his attempts at emendation, for it was not easy to augment the simplicity; nor has he done it:—it was easier to pass over it a careless and less gentle hand, and impair the elegance and lofty sympathy with which it closes.

All who read the Forsaken Mistress will be grieved to think, that the poet who could charm us so much in his native tongue should have poured the stream of his fancy into the dark regions of Latin verse, and laboured, like Buchanan, to make the world feel his genius in a language which only a few of the opulent understood. I cannot imagine how a man can hope to write felicitously out of his mother tongue: by what spell is he to be possessed with all the proverbial turnings and windings of language, all those meltings of word into word—those gradations of meaning direct and implied, which give a deeper sense than they seem to bear, and assist in the richness and the strength of composition? The language may be learned, and words may be meted out in heroic or lyric quantities by the aid of a discreet ear; but such verses will want the original flavour of native poetry—the leaf will come without the fragrance, and the blossom without the fruit. I may mention that the Forsaken Mistress seems to unite the two characteristics of Scottish and English song; there is story mingled with sentiment—the former without prolixity, and the latter without conceit. I cannot always say so much for either the one or the other when they come separate.

FRANCIS SEMPLE.

Tradition of late has provided authors for some of our favourite songs; and since authentic history declines to chronicle those who furnish matter for present and future mirth, I can see no harm in accepting the aid of traditionary remembrance. On such authority, aided by the less doubtful testimony of family papers, Francis Semple of Beltrees has obtained the reputation of writing three popular songs, "The blythesome Bridal," "Maggie Lauder," and "She rose and loot me in." I have heard the tradition, but I have not seen the family manuscripts; and though I am not obliged to believe what I cannot with certainty contradict, yet I have no right to discredit what honest men have seriously asserted: the story has been years before the world, and if any be sceptical, they are also silent. Semple is of itself a worthy name—I am glad tradition has taken its part: besides, we owe much poetic pleasure to the ancestors of Francis, who wrote, like their descendant, with great ease and freedom; and why should not the mantle descend?

Whoever wrote these three popular songs, I confess I prefer his humour to his seriousness, his mirth to his gravity. There is a certain air of heaviness about "She rose and loot me in," which is thrown off, as the morning sun throws off the cloud, when the festive subjects of "The blythesome Bridal" and "Maggie Lauder" are presented to his fancy. They who are offended by the

uncontrollable humour and broad glee of the latter cannot fail to be captivated by the admirable naïveté and witty grace of the former. Even the controversy which the lass of Anster Town has occasioned has helped to proclaim her name and attractions to the world. "It is a song of more than dubious meaning," quoth Gravity; "and more is meant than meets the ear." "It is a lyric full of harmless merriment," answers Mirth; "and what can be dubious in the din of a bagpipe and the dancing of a maiden?" "Her garments are too high kilted," says Chastity, "and her dancing on a lonesome burn bank to the music of a strolling piper is very indecorous." "Ah! but she's a pleasant lass," replies Humour: "her strapping limb and gawcie middle would make gray-heads wish to be young—Decorous! I wish all our ladies were as decorously employed as in wagging their limbs to the sound of a merry melody." "Make no personal reflections," quoth Hypocrisy:—and so the ball is kept flying, and the fame of Maggie Lauder is ever in the air.

"The blythesome Bridal" gathers together many singular characters, and prepares a dinner fit only for the entertainment of such guests. Smollett's feast in the manner of the ancients is unworthy to be compared to it; for none save the entertainer could enjoy a meal with an antique flavour strong enough to have smothered Lucullus. The viands of Semple are in strict conformity with the culinary fancy and practice of old Caledonia; and the guests and the dishes are the whimsical but native produce of the country. We have no other song or

story which spreads such a remarkable feast for such extraordinary people. That the poet has drawn a ludicrous company, and dished out a dinner more for men to laugh at than enjoy, is perfectly true, and in that lies much of the beauty. A bridegroom must be curious in uncouth companions who invited to his wedding all the queer characters of the county; and very particular in his taste, if he had for his banquet all the strange dishes which his knowledge of cookery, written and oral, could prescribe. But the poet is one person, and the bridegroom another: what gives the former enjoyment, will give the latter pain: the matter which fills the fancy of the one with images of humour and drollery, will make the other sigh and repine: no bridegroom would wish to preside among such a motley squad, but any poet would be proud of having painted them. It is the province of poetic mirth to gather such strange sticks together, and tie them with party-coloured thread. The company and their feast are beyond the reach of any art save poetry: even Wilkie could not paint fadges and brochan, and the rich odour which ascended from the bridal dinner; nor could Chantrey carve Madge, that was buckled to Steenie, nor Kirsh with the lily-white leg, and the strange way in which her misfortune befel.

The freedom with which some of the characters are drawn has gone far to exclude the song from company which calls itself polished. I quarrel not with matters of taste—but taste is a whimsical thing. Ladies of all ranks will gaze by the dozen and the hour on the unattired grace and proportion of the old statues, and

feel them o'er, like the wondering miller in Ramsay's exquisite tale, lest glamour had beguiled their een; but the colour will come to their cheeks, and the fans to their faces, at some over warm words in our old minstrels: whatever is classical is pure. They are a strange and a deluding sex; their tastes to-day, and their dislikes to-morrow,

> let learned clerks explain,
> They pass the wit of simple swain.

WILLIAM WALKINSHAW.

"Willie was a wanton Wag," one of our popular songs, has been long ascribed by tradition to Walkinshaw of Walkinshaw, near Paisley; and as tradition in this matter can neither be confirmed nor contradicted, I must accept general concurrence for certainty, and give that gentleman the authorship of one of our most original songs. Whoever was the author, no one ever conceived a more original lyric, or filled up the outlines of his conception with more lucky drollery, more lively flashes of native humour, or brighter touches of human character. Willie is indeed the first and last of his race: no one has imitated him, and he imitated none. He is a surpassing personage, an enthusiast in merriment, a prodigy in dancing; and his careless graces and natural gifts carry love and admiration into every female bosom. The eulogium of the bride equals a certificate of character by the parish minister; his rapidity in com-

municating pleasure seems as quick as the diffusion of light; and yet all this, so welcome to the bride, and so agreeable to the lasses, in general, costs him no effort—to please is natural to him: his careless ease and buoyant happiness of manner, his wanton leg and his roguish look, become him as fruit becomes the tree, or light the moon. The very "tag" at his shoulder has something talismanic about it.

That our poet's glee sometimes hovers on the debateable land between propriety and indelicacy, I am not disposed to deny; but if the light of his genius, like that of the will-o'-wisp, glimmers over the mire, it never falls into it. The author has drawn the whole wedding scene with such fidelity and resemblance to life, that we see it revealed before us fresh and moving: there laugh the lasses, there blinks the bride, and there the "lag" bridegroom yields up the contest with the inimitable Willie, who, like the general spirit of fun and life, shines out in the midst, and animates and inspires them. Since tradition has helped this song to an author, I wish it had done as much for "Andrew wi' his cutty Gun," and "Tibbie Fowler o' the Glen," songs of kindred spirit, and rivals in humour and naïveté, and every way worthy of finding fathers in some sponsible personage.

ALLAN RAMSAY.

In Allan Ramsay I see the great successor to the royal race of bards, who laid the foundation of the rustic

or national poetry of Scotland, in Peblis to the Play, Christ's Kirk on the Green, and the Gaberlunyie Man; and I see more, I see in him the restorer of song, and the first who strove to redeem from oblivion, or rescue from the changeful memory of tradition, the ancient lyrics of the nation. In the passion, enthusiasm, and elegance of lyric composition, he has been far indeed surpassed; but he has never been surpassed in rustic glee, frank, manly humour, and in his happy groupings of humble life. He is warm, over warm perhaps, in some of his addresses to beauty, and less delicate than a poet now would desire to be who wishes to be published in that sweetest of all ways of publication, by the lips of the ladies. He may be justly accused also of being much too blunt and direct in his mode of wooing, and far too plain and too honest for negotiating in lyric verse with a court lady now: he dispenses with all chivalrous ceremony of approach, and never moves for a moment in the parallel lines which modesty and fear have laid down for lovers to walk in. Yet I am judging him too strictly when I try him by the present gazette standard of female delicacy and fashion. He was once amazingly popular, with high-born dames as well as with humble; and I am not to suppose, that in the year of grace, 1724, the ladies were less virtuous in conduct than at present. They spoke with some freedom when they allowed poets to sing such unceremonious strains.

In all he writes there is a large measure of enjoyment, and he sings from the fulness and overflowing of mirth and humour. What he sees, he sees for himself; living

life is ever present to his eye, and he has made himself intimate with nature in all her familiar varieties. He sings of domestic love and fireside enjoyment like one who knows what charms a kind wife and promising children cast over a susceptible heart; and he loves to paint the ridiculous pretensions of age to the warmth and animation of youth, to extract mirth and amusement out of the follies of gray heads, and to make the words of love drop as cold from their lips as rain from a winter cloud. He pours out his humour till delicacy cries enough; he shows so much of the white legs of his rustic beauties that all their descendants grieve for the scantiness of longitude in their grandmothers' garments; and he dishes out domestic life in sauce too savoury for the prudent dames of the present generation. He forgets nature sometimes for the sake of foreign gods,

> And lays his lugs in Pindus spring,
> And invocates Apollo.

He had little tenderness, and little elevation of sentiment; he had raptured moments, but they were those of ordinary peasants. His ease was the ease of nature, and his gift lay in grouping rustic characters, in seizing on the infirm and ridiculous side of human life: he had less power in personating sweet and austere female modesty and grace, or in painting the gentle but wayward emotions of the bosom.

In his restorations of ancient song he has been sometimes singularly unhappy; he inherited little of the gift

of creating new verses in the spirit and feeling of the old, when the starting train of thought required elevation or purity. In the song of Bessie Bell and Mary Gray he has despised the plaintive warning of the old commencing words, and offered violence to one of our most moving and romantic stories, by infusing mirth instead of sadness, and gaiety for simple pathos. But his fortune is far otherwise when he has mirth or humour for his companions; he renews the laugh, and renovates the glee, and revives the humour, with a skill and an earnestness which have never been surpassed, and but rarely equalled.

It has been for some time the practice to upbraid Allan with negligence in collating, and want of sympathy in editing ancient songs; his accusers forget that he was the first who made the attempt, and that without his aid we might have had nothing where we have much—that he was a daily labourer for his bread, and had not leisure to go in quest of the torn and bleeding members of old song: that he rescued many from certain oblivion, we have the evidence of his works; but that he threw willingly away any of our beautiful antique lyrics for the sake of filling their place with his own, we have no assurance save surmise. He says, indeed, that feeling assured how acceptable new songs to known tunes would prove, he had made verses for more than sixty, and thirty more were done by ingenious young gentlemen. But Allan, with all his vanity—and he had a reasonable share—and with all his imperfect taste—and he was not without it—had far too keen a sense of the beauties of

song to cast any productions of merit away. Songs of genius protect themselves against duller rivals; they would have outlived—since they had lived so long—the negligence of any collector, and found safe sanctuary in some of those compilations with which the land was soon inundated. They who seek to believe that up to the time of Ramsay we had many oral lyrics of great antiquity and beauty, imagine also that he has supplanted them in popular esteem by his own inferior works—that he has buried the old gold to give currency to the baser metal of his own coining. I cannot see how the charge can be either substantiated or disproved, and he must be content to be assailed or defended by those who put harsh or charitable constructions on a passage which is open to both. How far he endeavoured to supply the place of what was lost, correct what was indelicate, or elevate what was silly, we may inquire in vain. But we may well imagine the song to be gross which Ramsay omitted on account of its indelicacy, and very dull and very weak which he threw away when he was labouring to fill up the craving appetite of volumes. It cannot be denied, that he gave a willing place in his collection to many exquisite old songs—that he preserved and eked out with more or less happiness many fragments and many choruses;—and are we to suppose that he denied the like care to any other deserving lyric? Of the many fragments of oral song which it has been my fortune to find, a number of them bear the names and characters of those which have been numbered among the lost favourites of our forefathers—they are

all alike licentious and indiscreet; and if I may judge of those suppressed by those that have survived, we ought rather to praise Ramsay's good sense than to censure his want of sympathy with the remains of our minstrelsy.

One of the foremost in bringing this charge against Ramsay was Mr. Ritson, who reproaches him with assisting ingenious young gentlemen to supplant the exquisite works of our ancestors. This reproach might have been spared; since two of Allan's friends in this labour are two of our sweetest lyric poets. Ramsay was certainly no very careful remover of the dust and cobwebs from ancient verse, and Ritson was as dry and as barren as the other was rash or careless. The latter was a learned and laborious person without the light of genius to guide him amid the gross darkness of antiquarian research; and the former sought after truth with less solicitude, perhaps, since he was sure of the poet's wreath if he missed the critic's. The Englishman edited poetry without much sense of its beauty, and watched over the scattered relics of fugitive song with the vigilance of a dragon: the Scotchman lived before this fastidiousness had become a fashion; while the changes which time was continually making in oral song were of every day occurrence, which he seemed to imitate when he filled up the gaps and breaches in old verse with a clever hand, and with an eye that was not more than nice in the choice of materials. Ritson's delight was in mutilated ballads, and he seemed not unwilling to be pleased sometimes with what he did not understand:

Ramsay loved no such mystery—he was a plain man, and relished a well told tale; and when he came to a difficult passage, he solved it like a poet, by making a verse in its place. If he made mistakes, and sometimes missed the feeling and spirit of the old melodies, he had many beauties to compensate, which were as much beyond the reach of Ritson as the critic's accuracy was beneath the poet's notice. Had Joseph edited the Reliques of Percy, he would have made a work as dreary as a Lincolnshire fen—had he collected the Minstrelsy of the Border, many of our most exquisite ballads would have remained amid the rubbish which obscured them, and we should have felt in his labours something like the misery of an invasion. The language of Ramsay is still as fresh, and his images of rustic life as living-like, as they were a hundred years ago.

LADY WARDLAW.

Neither history nor tradition has preserved any other proof of a genius of a very high order than is contained in the martial and pathetic ballad of Hardyknute, which both tradition and history combine in ascribing to Lady Wardlaw, daughter of Sir Charles Halkett of Pitferran. From the curiosity of her compeers or the vanity of her family, some other specimens of her poetic powers might have been expected—but whatever was looked for, nothing has come; and this is only equalled by her own modesty in seeking to confer

on an earlier age the merit of a production which of itself establishes a very fair reputation.

Much has been said and written against the antiquity of Hardyknute; for it was published as ancient, and is now become old in the duration of more than a century of controversy; but nothing has ever been said against its antique simplicity and sweetness, and its vivid imagery and pathetic beauty. Time, which dims the brightness of all that is not rooted deep in nature, has not impaired its lustre; and the gray-haired grandeur of the hero, and the feminine grace and fondness of Fairlie Fair, are never likely to escape from a reader's or a singer's memory. That it is modern there can be no doubt—the work of the ancient days resembles not the polished grace and the flowing melody of the compositions of the last century. I am, however, inclined to believe that it was founded on the remains of some romantic ballad; and that into the story of the old minstrel, Lady Wardlaw poured a spirit and feeling of her own, which communicated all the softer and more amiable qualities of the composition. There are certainly many passages which wear an olden look, and the mutable history of ballad poetry presents in a thousand places such renovations of ancient verse—skeletons upon which the Muse had breathed, recalling them to fresh life and a new existence. To a mind deeply embued with song and ballad, a few fragments would exhibit enough to inspire the finished story, emblazoned in all the splendour of Scottish romance. Gill Morrice and Tamlane owe no little of their present beauty to such

loving-kindness, and the variations of song and ballad conceal many affectionate and exquisite touchings and infusions which add to the fame of our songs; yet no one ever doubts that the original framework of the story is old—very old.

WILLIAM CRAWFORD.

To William Crawford of Auchinames we owe some of our sweetest pastoral lyrics, and he shares in the glory or the shame, as poets or antiquaries speak, of assisting Ramsay with new songs for the old melodies. Though I certainly regard pastoral poetry as a foreign importation—as a sound to which the heart of Scotland has returned but a faint echo—I cannot refuse the praise of great nature, and tenderness, and truth, to the author of Tweedside and the Bush aboon Traquair. He speaks, it is true, of Flora, and sometimes breathes the luxurious richness of Sicilian landscape over the hills and vales of Scotland; but he gives us many sweet images of domestic life—utters many a moving complaint—and watches his flocks in very agreeable company. His pipe, like the pipe of Ramsay, is

> A dainty whistle with a pleasant sound;

and it summons to modest love and chaste joy. Like the voice of the cuckoo, it calls us to the green hills, the budding trees, and the rivulet bank; to the sound of water and the sight of opening flowers.

It was the fashion of his day to utter pastoral lamentations, and complain of the caprice or the cruelty of shepherdesses. The sorrows of Corydon, and the coyness of Phyllis, and all the imaginary woes of artificial existence, have been woven with much elegance and grace into the many-coloured web of our lyric poetry. This pastoral taint entered not, as far as I am able to discern, into that ever living and natural spirit which supplies, from time to time, many of our most lasting strains: it was the malady of learning rather than of nature, the gentle disease of opulence rather than of poverty. They who introduced it and laboured in its support were men whom fortune had placed beyond the necessity of daily toil; and as they had felt the langour of idleness, and the misery of having no visible pursuit, they supposed toil to be the sweetest of all dispensations—a shepherd the happiest of living mortals—and his cottage the abode only of pleasure and poetry. They dipt their pens in perfume, and wrote a strain which showered roses among our heather, myrtles among our broom; made our streams run through beds of lilies, and our shepherds tread on everlasting verdure, and sing under bowers of jasmine and sweet-bleeding myrrh. Their swains wore garlands in their hair, and roses in their shoes, and wooed their nymphs in set speeches about old Pan, and songs about Arcadian groves, and the servitude of Apollo to Admetus.

All this costs little thought, and less observation. When poetry ceases to echo passion and reflect nature, it may be created like the morning gossamer; but it

must be content to be as frail and as fleeting. In common pastoral strains there is little of the truth of life; the shepherds are only summer swains unacquainted with the hard vicissitudes of seasons—who never sought their flocks amid mist and rain, or dug them out of a snow wreath some three fathoms deep. They are ignorant of the surgery of sheep; of the diseases which assail, or the vermin which torment them; and never dream of the fox, the murrain, or the moor-ill. Snow, said the wise man, is beautiful in its season; but our pastoral poets were not wise men, and snow never descends on their landscape; and they sigh for a shepherd's life because they think his slumbers are among roses—that curds and cream are eternally prepared for him by some neat-handed Phyllis—and that he never listens to a more sorrowful sound than the melody of his own pipe. The sharp cold air on a Caledonian mountain would freeze such holiday spirits up: to sit with wet feet on a wild hill, and seek shelter in a smoky hovel during the night, and be summoned from slumber by a wind which, instead of coming with frankincense on its wings, comes with mingled sleet and hail, are facts which seem never to have darkened their dreams.

The landscape of the natural pastoral Muse, and the seat where she sings, are of a far different character. A hill of heath,—a stream, half hid, half seen, amid a fringe of rock and hazel,—braes of broom, and mosses waving with canna, and smoke rising at the distance of many miles, to show that man is there, form the scenes of her contemplation. The ruins of an ancient castle, the

gravestone of some martyred worthy, and the peak of the parish kirk, may mix with these wilder objects, to remind her that she once strung her harp under the security of the sword, that persecution for conscience' sake once visited her pastoral wilderness, and that in her strains she should mix purity with her mirth, and holiness with her joy. The true Muse of native pastoral seeks not to adorn herself with unnatural ornament; her spirit is in homely love and fireside joy: tender and simple, like the religion of the land, she utters nothing out of keeping with the character of her people and the aspect of the soil—and of this spirit, and of this feeling, Crawford is a large partaker.

WILLIAM HAMILTON.

William Hamilton, a scholar and a gentleman, was one of our first lyric poets who sought to communicate a classic grace and courtly decorum to Scottish song. Not that equal grace and as finished courtliness had not been exhibited before, but they were beauties rather of accident than design; rather the natural or vagrant flowers of the soil than the production of settled thought and deliberate judgment. But the continual wish to be polished and polite interferes with passionate thought and the onward flow of emotion; and we have felt, in the sparkling lines of Hamilton, the absence of a ruder, but more expressive poetry, which made its way to the heart without much assistance from the head.

Prudence will always speak in character; she will be wise—she may be witty—she will utter nothing which is not pure and perhaps instructive: but passion is beyond all petty restraints; she will speak with vigour and with warmth; and as she speaks with the tongue of nature, her words will be happy, and her thoughts akin to inspiration. With the former of these dames, the Muse of Hamilton is content to dwell: she is ever graceful and ever neat; always wearing the dress which the reigning fashion has established; and all that she sings has been measured out with caution, and examined with a fastidious delicacy. The heart of the poet was more susceptible than ardent; he seemed, indeed, to be poetically under the influence of beauty, and continually suffering from the caprice or the scorn of some reigning despot, whose charms were equal to the destruction of a whole dynasty of pastoral bards. But he pleased himself, perhaps, with the lovely fictions of his own fancy, and never carried his homage farther than the harmless speculations of elegant verse.

He has, indeed, been charged with complaining of cruelty which he never felt, and of the influence of loveliness, for which he had no regard. If he obtained inspiration from beauty on such moderate terms, he is one of the luckiest of all lyrists: he would have been unwise had he scorched himself, when he only wished for heat; and he might have been charged with folly had he purchased the tree for the sake of the apple. If he formed an idol from the resources of his own fancy, and clothed it in beauty, and endowed it with all the graces

that could captivate and enslave, and then fell down and worshipped it, he only did what poetic genius has ever done, when, like the touched imagination of Don Quixote, it creates a goddess out of a very ordinary mortal.

Amid all the elegance and happy flow and delicate turn of language which distinguish his songs, he fails to make the impression which far less polished works make: he has little from nature; most from art: there are no unstudied turns of thought—no unsought happinesses of expression. His flow is not the spontaneous motion of the stream; and polish is communicated to his verse, like brightness to a key, by repeated handling. Yet though far from the native truth of Crawford, and wanting the clear original images and vivid portraiture of life and manners which distinguish Ramsay, he excels them both in the exquisite richness of his flattery, the delicacy of his compliments, and the neatness of his praise. He has far more chivalry than any of our earlier poets, but it is a fire which rather smoulders than burns; and the submission and courtesy, with which he makes his approaches to woman, proceed less from a natural consciousness of her beauty, or a reverence for her person, than from a sense of etiquette, and a conformity to polished manners. And this may perhaps explain the charge which has been made against him of being insensible in his heart to woman's beauty, even while her praise was on his lips. The language of courtesy was mistaken for that of love; and when an open declaration of true passion, in plain prose, was

expected, the lady was petrified by verse—she snatched at a husband, and filled her arms with bays.

This awe and submission in the presence of woman, so beautiful and holy when mingled with sincere tenderness and honest passion, is cold and courtly when it only personates politeness and education. Our older ballads and songs make the charms and the chastity of the fair too subservient to the interest of the story, and are full of unwedded mothers and dames of dubious fame, who wander in the greenwood and cheer nocturnal lovers under the light of the moon. Of this easy system of morality Hamilton has retained no traces; but neither has he retained much of the peculiar character of Scottish song. It was the fashion of his day to choose out a mistress, real or imaginary, and to pursue her through vale and over hill with the wail and supplication of pastoral verse. This visionary sort of love led often to something purer perhaps, but far less natural, than the love of flesh and blood: we cannot help looking at the shape on which the poet has conferred so many attractions, as we would gaze on an allegory; and we contemplate her rather as the *beau ideal* of pastoral sensibility or affectation than as the living hope and joy of man's heart.

DAVID MALLET.

The ballad of William and Margaret, and a lyric or two in a less natural spirit, have given more fame to David Mallet than all his elaborated productions.

He wrote at a time when a lucky song or a popular ballad established a poet's fame, and furthered his fortune by introducing him to the notice of the noble. Had he lived lately, he would have died, like Chatterton, for want of bread—like Burns, in dread of a gaol—or like poor Tannahill, from the daily feeling of poverty and disappointment. That there is no patron to protect the Muse, was, is, and ever will be, the complaint: poets are too proud to sue, and too independent to beg, and refuse to plead the original sin of verse to entitle them to protection and relief: the rich and the noble, on the other hand, whom a wise Providence has made stewards for the poor, refuse to acknowledge poverty that is not clamorous, or want that displays not its rags and its sores.—With them, Poverty should come as one that runneth, and Want as an armed man.

I have been unable to trace in the other lyrics of Mallet any of that simple mode of expression, or that sweet and antique grace, which have brought so much fame to William and Margaret. The story, suggested by the fragments from which he imagined the song, seems to have possessed him too much to allow him to think of laborious polish or minute embellishment: he has been obliged to relieve his heart from the supernatural spirit of the tale by the charm of natural and inspired verse. I know not where to seek a finer mixture of pathos and terror in the whole range of Gothic romance. We feel, while we read, the presence of something unearthly and undefined; and we hear a voice which, like that heard by the prophet, makes all our

bones to shake. From the calm and gentle reproach of the spirit, we imagine the Margaret of flesh and blood to have been a meek and sweet tempered being; and in the request which she makes to have her maiden vow and faith returned, we remark the presence of an old superstition which allowed no repose to the living or to the dead till all ineffectual pledges or tokens were again exchanged.

Into this simple story and native style of composition the feelings of Mallet seem to have glided, as sap ascends the tree, to reanimate and cover it with beauty. Yet the polished and colder and less graphic style of verse must have warred against the remains of this Scottish taste, when he was induced to make some alterations which not only lessen the simplicity, but impair the terror which the story inspires. At first he caught up the starting note of the old fragments, and sang—

> When all was wrapt in dark midnight,
> And all was fast asleep.

He afterwards thought this "too naked of ornament and simple," and changed it to—

> 'Twas at the silent solemn hour,
> When night and morning meet.

Now this emendation not only contradicts all belief,

which invariably surrenders the midnight to injured spirits, but also asserts that the hour when night is growing into day is more solemn and more fit for such visitations than that to which rustic faith assigns all the terrific forms which are contained in his creed. In restoring the original lines, I may, in my own justification, observe, that the ballad will be rendered more true to superstition, and likewise more consistent with itself:

> Awake, she cried, thy true love calls,
> Come from her midnight grave.

The speed of this ghost was unlike that of all sister spirits, if it rose at midnight, and did not stand at its victim's bedside sooner than the hour when night and morning meet. The real cause of the alteration was, perhaps, the want of correspondence in rhyme between the second and fourth lines: it is rhyme to the ear—I mean, there is an uniformity of sound which gratifies the ear in singing equal to the most established rhymes, but there is no rhyme to the eye—and to oblige the eye, the poet spoiled his ballad. Nor was this so trivial a matter in days when the natural beauty of poetry was under the control of a mechanical arrangement of sounds: Dr. Johnson treated with contempt one of our finest lyrics—"Ah, the poor shepherd's mournful fate!" for a similar inequality of rhyme. In the other songs of Mallet there is more polish and much prettiness, and a

fine subdued modesty of language and thought, which make them favourites with all lovers of gentle and unimpassioned verse; but we have no more Williams and Margarets.

LORD BINNING.

I notice the song of Lord Binning more from a wish to say something respecting the false wit and unnatural humour of the composition, than from a belief that it entitles its author to a distinguished place among the lyric poets of his country. Ritson, with incredible infirmity of taste, calls Robin and Nanny a beautiful pastoral, and the poet a promising young nobleman. The pastoral beauty of a narrative rich in conceits cannot be great; and the poetical promise could be but moderate of one who coquetted with words till he made them wanton, and whose chief wish was the fame of scattering curious puns among the peasants of Scotland. Such lyrical specimens of wit may suit the meridian of a city, where all the strange meanings which pleasant conversation inflicts on words are felt and admired; but they are thrown away on the blunter intellects of country people, before whom illegitimate fancy scatters her false pearls in vain. In this respect the song of Lord Binning resembles some of the favourite lyrics of England, such as are clapped at theatres and encored in city clubs; and I assign him a rank of which he perhaps would have been proud, when I class him with

those wits who sought the pastoral of nature among dames

> Whose flambeaux flash against the morning skies,
> And gild our chamber ceilings as they pass,

and its current language in smart sayings and in snap conceits. All such writers forsake simplicity and nature, and must share, with a witty and exquisite poet, in the just censure which Burns passes on his pastorals:—

> Squire Pope but busks his skinklin patches
> Of heathen tatters.

Productions such as these present a knowledge of the town, and are full of pretty points and lively antitheses; but they breathe not of the homely heart of England:—they give us an image of city society, of mercantile or professional cleverness, of a choice club of wits, of a city of punsters. The mass of the English people are not of a literary turn, their hearts have long since ceased to respond to the sound of their ancient historic or romantic ballads, and the peasantry have not a literature of their own, like their brethren of the north; but were their old spirit to be reawakened, they would demand something of a more simple, and, perhaps, moving nature, than the subtleties of wit and the smartness of epigram. To start some lively or witty image, and pursue it through several stanzas, and then

close its career with a sally of fresh wit, or a gay conceit, may amuse the head, but it arouses not the heart. This manifest seeking after things smart, this continual desire to conclude every verse with something penetrating or acute, is most unhappily employed in the praise of beauty: we lose sight of the lady in pursuit of the wit, or cannot see her for the paste-pearls and imitation-jewels with which she is covered. Yet Robin and Nanny is a smart lively thing—a good lyrical joke, and I shall print it as a warning rather than as an example.

JAMES THOMSON.

Of the lyric powers of the author of The Seasons little more can be said than that his songs are distinguished for softness and grace—for an easy and equable flow of elegant language; and that, amid much kindliness of nature, and concise propriety of expression, he is seldom warm or impassioned. It is unfortunate for his fame as a lyric poet, that he wrote The Seasons and the Castle of Indolence. His Muse loved what was magnificent more than what was minute, and excelled in scenes of natural grandeur more than in images of domestic endearment and homely delight. The splendour of his other works eclipses the light of his songs. In looking on the rose, we forget the daisy; in gazing on the rising sun, we forget the beauty of the stars; in admiring a colossus, we turn not aside to examine a head carved out of a cherry-stone. He had a deeper sympathy

with nature, and found more solace in following her through all the changes of place and season, than in what a Cameronian not unwisely called "woman worship." Nature he loved to pursue "through summer's heat and winter's snow,"—through vales of spice, and over the mountains and the waves; but woman he was content to admire at a safer distance: he perhaps knew her fondness to be, as the poet found it, "a lovely and a fearful thing," and continued heart-free, though not fancy-free. His Amanda cannot be blamed for keeping her feet in spite of the witchery of songs which were more sweet than sincere, and had little warmth and less passion. He perhaps loved woman as he loved fruit, which he liked to come drop-ripe to his lips, without the trouble of plucking—and admired her as he did the apple, when he ate it off the branch with his hands in his waistcoat pockets.

His songs are indeed the careless productions of one employed on higher things, and express the feelings of a kind rather than of a warm heart, of a cultivated rather than of a gifted mind. He seeks not to embellish humble life, to picture out homely enjoyments, or to extract poetical grace and lyric beauty from the common employments and conditions of the people of his native land. His heart is not with Scotland when he sings; and though sprung from humble life himself, he shows no marks of his original condition—he is silent on the subject of the peasantry of his country—he has added nothing to their winter evening mirth or joy, and is almost the only instance of a northern poet whose songs

are not heard among the cottages of his dwelling place. But he has bequeathed us something better than song in those scenes of inspired description and sublime morality which make him an inmate of every house, and a benefactor to mankind.

TOBIAS SMOLLETT.

Those who only see in Smollett the author of some pure and ardent verses in praise of his mistress, and feel but the tender sweetness and native ease with which in "Leven Water" he has shed his affection over the scenes of his youth, do him great injustice. To have a full tasting of his indignant and pathetic spirit, we must know him in his "Tears of Scotland," and seek him in that passage in one of his prose tales, so inexpressibly touching, where his Jacobite exiles stand every morning on the coast of France to contemplate the blue hills of their native land, to which they are never to return. That pathetic lyric entitles him to take his place as the representative of a great number of authors of a peculiar character, whose songs have obtained some notice from the cause in which they were composed, but far more from their strength of humour, vigour of invective, their buoyancy of hope, and the pathos of their despair. To say that in his productions I see the full glory of Jacobite song, and that in lyric beauty he surpasses all his nameless brethren, is to say more than he merits, for in the higher qualities of lyric composition

his verses are inferior to some of those to which no author's name can be given. His grief is calm and contemplative; he sympathizes with human misery from principle more than from the heart; and the picture which he paints of the desolation which followed the steps of the Duke of Cumberland would suit the train of any conqueror, whether in Scythia or in Scotland. It is only he who feels wrongs deeply that can deeply sing them; and it is from him who has been hunted from cave to hill, who has seen his house destroyed, and his wife and children perishing, that we are to look for those bursts of nature, passion, and despair, which mark the time, the cause, and the people.

It is true, indeed, that the cause for which they suffered was that of tyranny against independence, of divine right against common sense and natural liberty, of superstition against the religion of the people's heart. But right is one thing and romance another; and a cause may be full of all which gives nerve or pathos to poetry, may have a thousand qualities by which imagination may be captivated and the heart deeply moved, without rational devotion or true liberty lending a single ray to brighten it. The principles of liberty, and the spirit of poesie, are different things: freedom of conscience, and the Bill of Rights, are no more necessary to the interests of lyric romance than prudence and self-control are useful to the dramatic interest of a tragedy. Government, after all, is but a subject of taste; and, to the multitude, it may be a matter of indifference whether they are mastered by many or by one: power will

always belong to the strong, and obedience must always come from the weak. For my own part I would rather be oppressed by one than by ten, if I am to be oppressed: the people of England, after many years of civil war, only exchanged the tyranny of Charles Stuart for that of a few military adventurers. Religion, too, is much the same as government, and the minds of men have formed many capricious varieties of faith out of a very clear, and simple, and well-defined system of practice and belief. The mantle of the Christian religion, like the coat of Joseph, is of many colours, and imagination has a large choice: from the plain and simple presbyterian, up to the head of the Romish church, there are firm believers, and there have been martyrs: yet belief is not truth; and martyrdom may be a mark of zeal, but cannot surely be accepted as a certain sign that the faith of the sufferer was right.

> How many perish for the truth
> O' the elephant and monkey's tooth.

But however the Jacobites may have erred against the light of human freedom, both civil and religious, and however much the heart of Scotland may have risen against the cause for which they struggled and bled, the time was soon to come when, from a powerful and a warlike body, they were to be broken and dispersed, their houses razed, their families left desolate, and their heads stuck up to blacken and corrupt in the public places. It was then, and not till then, that the

hearts of the people began to melt. They thought on the ruin of the lineal race of their ancient kings, on the desolation of many a noble house that had warred of old for Scotland's independence; and looking on the visible tokens of vindictive and cruel policy, the ravaged cot and the weeping orphan, the heart carried away the head, and a sympathy, deep and durable, was excited, which only subsided in the measures of mercy and of affection which followed the death of the last of the Stuarts. It is from this feeling that we are to look for the origin of many of our Jacobite songs; and though no doubt some of them are the productions of exiles, and sufferers, and partisans, others are the work of men who loved liberty as fondly, their native land as dearly, their religion as devoutly, and the constitution of the country as deeply, as the wisest that ever offered daily sacrifice to that judicious goddess Prudence. We have been told, indeed, that no lofty feeling belonged to those who shared with Prince Charles Stuart in his short career of victory, and in his long period of suffering and endurance; that they warred to repair the slights of the court, or the injuries of fortune, or from some other motive equally selfish. This may have been so with the few, but was it with the many? Can we forget the pathetic heroism of many of the sufferers, and, above all, can we forget what I am not ashamed to call the patriotic honesty of many thousands of the peasantry, who protected and saved their unhappy prince, while they knew that thirty thousand pounds would be the reward for betraying him? Let not the selfishness or the folly of a

few men give a colour to the conduct of others, who fought as few ever fought, and who suffered as few ever suffered, and who lost all that they had to lose of home or of country.

But let the Muse be answerable for her wayward strains, whether of folly or of wisdom. Like all romantic and indiscreet beings, she often lifts her voice in honour of the weak and in scorn of the strong; and had she seen the head of the Stuarts lifted, and their banner floating, as of old, she might, with an amiable inconsistency of principle, but in perfect keeping with poetry, have lent her strength to the weak, and turned her scorn on the prevailing. She will always prefer her art to her principles, and seek the elements of song rather from the heart than from the head. Many of these songs have little of party bitterness. It is wonderful what a tender root the hatred of the cause of the Stuarts struck in the north country; even the keenest of our sectarians, the Cameronians, continue to speak with a gentleness, almost approaching to affection, of the line of princes who persecuted them; and many well authenticated anecdotes might be told to prove how deeply the peasantry felt the hue and cry of blood which pursued so long the partisans of the exiled house. I have already said more than I wished to say: all that I desire to add is, the hope that no brave man will ever fight, and no enthusiastic poet ever sing, in the cause of tyranny, with half the bravery, or with half the beauty, our ancestors have done in the cause of the Stuarts.

LADY GRISSEL BAILLIE.

To Lady Grissel Baillie's claims on our regard as a lyric poetess have been lately added, by the publication of her Memoirs, claims of a deeper though less shining kind, those of a dutiful daughter and affectionate wife. She was the child of Patrick, Earl of Marchmont, and wife of the well known George Baillie of Jerviswood, whose widow she died in 1746. Her lot was cast in very stormy times, and her lively invention was employed in scenes of far deeper importance than in impressing humour and pathos on song. Her turn for domestic pleasure and home-bred mirth was only equalled by her sense of propriety and her regard for prudence; and she found her skill in song not only soothed her own cares, but was a solace amid times of sore trial to her friends, with whom her genius and her virtues were in high esteem. She left many unfinished songs; for domestic cares made the visitations of the Muse seldom, and the stay short: but the song on which her fame in verse must depend is one able enough to maintain it. Those who look in "Were nae my heart light I would dee," for fine and polished language, or for a very high strain of sentiment, must be content to be disappointed. But it has other attractions, of a more popular and equally durable kind; it is written in the fine free spirit of the rustic poetry of Scotland—the words are homely and the ideas are na-

tural; yet they are such as the heart of poesie only would have suggested; and they who seek to add deeper interest to the story, or to endow it with more suitable ideas, or more natural language, will owe their success as much to good fortune as to meditation. It is now an old favourite, though songs, with more melodious verse, and a more embellished style, have followed thick and threefold; yet its careless and artless ease, and simple, but graphic imagery, will continue to support its reputation against its more ostentatious associates. The description of a disappointed lover, depressed in spirit, and fancy-touched, will keep possession of every heart, and be present to every eye, till some poet exceed it in truth and felicity.

> And now he goes daunering about the dykes,
> And a' he dow do is to hound the tykes;
> The live lang night he ne'er steeks his e'e,
> And were nae my heart light I would dee.

She was among the first of a band of ladies who have contributed largely to the lyric fame of Scotland; nor is she the only one of her name who has given Scottish song the advantage of female genius. There is another who has breathed into it a far deeper pathos, and a far richer spirit: need I say it is Joanna Baillie?

MISS JANE ELLIOT, AND MISS RUTHERFORD.

I have classed these two poetesses together, not from the resemblance of their genius, for that was essentially different, but from the circumstance of their having sung on the same subject, and with much the same success—the fall of the youth of Selkirk on the field of Flodden. The fame of both songs has been widely diffused. They were imagined for a while to be old compositions, but there was no need to call antiquity to the aid of two such touching songs; and I have not heard that even an antiquary withdrew his admiration on discovering them to be modern. They are each of them remarkable for elegiac tenderness: with one it is the tenderness of human nature, with the other that of allegory, yet the allegory is so simple and so plain that it touches the most illiterate heart; and though it expresses one thing by means of another, all must understand it. Nature, however, is the safest companion in all that seeks the way to the heart, and with nature the song of Miss Elliot begins and continues. The history which tradition relates of these songs is curious: each has an origin after its kind, and one may almost read in them the readiness with which honest nature submits to the yoke of poetry, compared to the labour of reducing what Spenser calls a "dark conceit" to the obedience of verse.

Of Miss Elliot's song, Burns says, "This fine ballad

is even a more palpable imitation than Hardyknute; the manners, indeed, are old, but the language is of yesterday." I am not certain that our national lyrist has laid down the surest rule to ascertain the antiquity of verse; the language of traditional song is softened and modernized to correspond with current speech, while its manners, and images, and story, may remain whole and untouched. All oral literature is liable to the fluctuations of popular taste, and the change of language, from which written works are exempt; much of the original beauty of the expression may be impaired or improved, and the touches of native grace, or vagrant beauty, may be lessened or altered; yet still the original character, and manners, and imagery, will sustain less of a change than the language which conveys them. The arrow, whose gray goose wing was wet in the heart's blood of Montgomery, in the modernized ballad of Chevy Chase, was a shaft fledged from a swan's wing in the ancient copy—the vivid and natural image of swift death is the same in both.

The song of Miss Elliot was composed from the impulse of some ancient verses; and if there be such a thing as the transmigration of poetic soul, it has happened here. The most acute poetic antiquary could not, I think, single out, except by chance, the ancient lines which are woven into the song—the simulation is so perfect. The line with which it commences, "I've heard a lilting at our ewes milking," is old, and so is the often recurring line which presses on our hearts the desolation of the Forest. Now, admitting these lines to be old, can

we say that the remainder of the song has not in every line, in language, and image, and sentiment, the same antique hue, and spirit, and sound? The whole comes with a cry in our ears as from the survivors of Flodden Field; and, when it is sung, we owe little to imagination when we associate it with the desolation of the Forest, and hear in it the ancient wail of its maids and matrons.

For the song of Miss Rutherford a much more romantic origin is assigned: we are never satisfied with the simple account which genius is willing to give of the rise of its labours: whatever is uncommon must be done in an uncommon way. It is said that a young gentleman who had lost his way among the pastoral vales and hills of Selkirkshire came at last in sight of a young shepherd seated by a stream, watching his flocks, and playing on his pipe. Many wild and original tunes were played by the gifted shepherd, and his wondering auditor had the skill and the cunning to carry away one of the sweetest airs of this Selkirkshire Orpheus. He had next the good fortune to meet with Miss Rutherford, and the rustic air was married to very elegant verse. Such is the story which once told has been often repeated. The song, however, bears evidence of Miss Rutherford's knowledge of the fragments which Miss Elliot brooded over to such good purpose: and from the truth and simple beauty of these reliques I must suppose that the air was popular, and that the young gentleman found what had never been lost, but was living in the knowledge of thousands.

I am the less sorry that the ancient song has passed

into oblivion, since it lingered long enough to give rise to two such strains of tenderness and pathetic beauty. A still remembered fragment contains an affecting image, and shows that the old minstrel had poured his lamentation from a lady's lips:

I ride single on my saddle.

Miss Jane Elliot was the sister of Sir Gilbert Elliot of Minto, ancestor of the present earl: I have not heard that any other strain, either of mirth or of sorrow, flowed from her pen. Miss Rutherford was the daughter of Rutherford of Fairnalie, in Selkirkshire, and wife of Mr. Cockburn of Ormiston. "She has been dead some time," says an authority equally accurate and concise. "Even at an age advanced beyond the usual bounds of humanity, she retained a play of imagination, and activity of intellect, which was almost preternatural at her period of life. Her active benevolence keeping pace with her genius, rendered her equally an object of love and admiration."

I have not noticed the fragments from which these songs have been written with the wish of lessening the original merit of the two compositions. The merit of reviving or renovating an old song in the ancient spirit seems at least equal to the skill required to create a new one: it is enough that the fancy has to submit to a species of vocal imprisonment in composing a song as an echo to an air, without suffering the farther constraint of subject, language, and imagery.

SIR GILBERT ELLIOT.

When the poet Cowper reproached the Caledonian songs with their frequent birks and braes, his acquaintance with our lyrics perhaps was limited to some of those tainted with pastoral affectation, where, it must be confessed, the braes and the birks, and the pipes and the crooks, justify the satire of the Englishman. But as he became farther acquainted with our lyrics, he would find that our love of our native scenery, and skill in using it to give locality and season, and of course truth, to poetry, was not their only merit; that they indeed possessed a graphic truth, and simplicity, and humour, much akin to his own: he, therefore, in the succeeding editions of his works, omitted the reproach. In like manner, the charge of pastoral affectation, which has been urged with so much truth against some of our songs, fails in a great measure of its aim—the shaft has flown nearly all its flight, and falls harmless—where nature prevails against art, where truth is so blended with fiction that, like a lowland stream, the water is concealed by the fragrant broom which grows on its banks. The song which has given the name of Sir Gilbert Elliot a place among our lyric poets is one of great beauty; and the sheep-hook and the fresh garlands are forgotten in the strain of natural sorrow produced by neglected moments and unrequited love. It is one of the last and the best efforts of the pastoral Muse. I know

not whether to account it good fortune or design, which made the name of the heroine sound so like that of the family residence; but I am willing to believe in the prophetic strain which makes the cliffs echo, for many a later year, the song of "My sheep I neglected."

On Minto crags the moonbeams glint,
Where Barnhill hew'd his bed of flint,
Who flung his outlaw'd limbs to rest
Where falcons hang their giddy nest,
Mid cliffs from whence his eagle eye
For many a league his prey could spy;
Cliffs doubling on their echoes borne
The terrors of the robber's horn,
Cliffs which for many a later year
The warbling Doric reed shall hear,
When some sad swain shall teach the grove
Ambition is no cure for love.

As if it had not been enough for Sir Gilbert Elliot and his sister to write two of our favourite lyrics, and enjoy the credit of such compositions, by special grace and good fortune they have also each obtained a separate and lasting compliment in verse; the first in the Lay of the last Minstrel, and the latter in Marmion.

One of those flowers whom plaintive lay
In Scotland mourns as "wede away."

But Miss Rutherford may be supposed to divide the compliment with Miss Elliot, and she deserves it.

MRS. JOHN HUNTER.

The death-song of the Cherokee Indian has done more for the fame of Mrs. Hunter as a poetess than all her other lyric compositions. She is known, indeed, under her maiden name of Home, as an associate in the same task with Miss Elliot and Miss Rutherford; but her version of the Flowers of the Forest is deficient in simplicity, and presents none of those affecting and visible images of desolation which charm me in the others. It is elegant and flowing; but what is elegance or melody compared to natural pathos, and to those tender and moving pictures of domestic sorrow which are acknowledged by every heart that has felt or can dread calamity? Nature will always assert her right to rule over the heart, and will never surrender her influence to the most ingenious or most imposing allegory: when she wishes for tears or for sighs, she will never seek for them by general expressions or elaborate similes, but endeavour to obtain them by a few simple and minute touches:—to be pathetic, we must be particular.

But for her failure in the "Flowers of the Forest" we have obtained ample compensation in the death-song of the Indian: a song of a marked and original kind, bold and wild, and inexpressibly mournful, filling the heart with a kind of savage inspiration, which exalts us while we hear it sung, and gives us a species of lyric delight unknown before. We feel at once that Scotland has no

claim in inspiring the strain, that it breathes of another and a wilder land, and brings the boundless lakes and interminable forests of America, and her plumed hordes of martial barbarians, before us. The hero of the song has been painted by West, gazing at the light of life leaving the eyes of General Wolfe; and he has been sung by Campbell, as

> A stoic of the woods, a man without a tear:

but neither the painter nor the poet has presented a more vivid picture of indomitable courage and heroic firmness than has been drawn by this soft and feminine hand. In the wild and enthusiastic ballad of Macpherson's Farewell, we have the dauntless glee, the contempt of death, and the confidence in courage and in strength, which characterize the Scottish highlanders; and we have something not very dissimilar in the song of Hughie Graeme; but they want that strange wildness, that native flavour of the country, that peculiar cast of thought and imagery, by which the latitude of their birth-place may be laid down with all the nicety of geography. After this praise I shall be thought insensible to the merits of her other lyrics when I can only discover in them an agreeable flow of verse, and a discreet propriety of expression. None contain any of those bright and imperishable verses which we are induced to learn and are delighted to remember, and which, like the Cherokee Indian, when we wish our children to have them by heart, we find they have learnt already.

ALEXANDER ROSS.

Of Alexander Ross, author of the Fortunate Shepherdess, Scotland knows much less than it ought; and I am afraid my praise will not help to invite a fastidious reader to his pages, where homely fidelity of painting will but poorly atone for an ill-told tale and an uncouth dialect. I sought his book in the Scottish lowlands, but it had not found its way from the bosom of Buchan either by the more visible progress of trade, or by that kind of chance intercourse which the country holds with the town through travelling sellers of songs, and ballads, and histories; it has not therefore become popular among the peasantry, for whose perusal it was composed. The author, a man of education, allowed his eye to be bounded in its range by his native hills, and sought manners and language from no purer or more poetic source than the rustics who surrounded him. He was content to take the world as he found it; he copied nature with all her warts and moles, and was rude and unseemly not from negligence but from principle. He had little imagination, if imagination consists only in the creation of new and splendid things, in evoking, like a dreamer, something bright and unsubstantial, in conjuring up a phantom with seven heads and ten horns; nor had he much imagination, if imagination, by a soberer definition, be the power of creating something in strict conformity to acknowledged superstition and belief, and in extracting

poetry from the common pursuits, and opinions, and feelings of man—from the change of seasons, and the aspect of the universe. But he had an observing eye and a rough and a ready hand, and has contrived to please a large district by his skill in reflecting, in the natural mirror of verse, a distinct and agreeable image of the peasantry, with their pursuits and opinions.

That he brought to the service of the lyric Muse much original vigour of thought, happy selection of language, and natural and unstudied elegance of expression, is more than I am ready to say. His songs expand into poems, and he never can satisfy himself with a brief story, and a rapid sketch: he never read the memorable conclusion of the poet,

> ——Brevity is very good
> Where we are, or are not understood.

Yet he never seems too long to a rustic audience; and as it was for their applause he wrote, he was satisfied with attaining it. He wove their curious sayings and their flashes of rude wit into verse, and they rewarded him by an honest laugh, and endured with a patience, which merited a more inspired poet, his interminable lyrics.

MISS JENNY GRAHAME.

There is a kind of song which without aspiring after pathos or wit, or seeking to win our hearts by impassioned

expression or lofty sentiment, is nevertheless well worthy of notice and of the popularity which it has obtained. I mean songs which seek to instruct us in the humble duties of life, and desire to teach us the way to happiness, and pleasure, and peace. Having strayed into the paths of wisdom and of prudence, the Muse seems ashamed of singing the charms of regularity and economy with her own voice, and she accordingly utters her "saws" and her "instances," her admonition and her reproof, by the lips of the old and the devout. A mother, or rather a grandmother, instructs her volatile descendant in all the wiles of her sex, and unfolds for her use an extensive experience of her own, mingled and seasoned with the long-gathered wisdom of others. "To live in misery, but to dine on plate," seems the enviable distinction these douce lecturers aim at; true love is treated as a dream, and the substantial charms of opulence are the beginning and the end of the song. The enthusiasm of youth is made, by a more judicious Muse, to endure the counsel of a less interested tongue. An ancient relative, or a venerable aunt, proceeds to initiate a maiden on the point of escaping from her teens into the mysteries of coquetry, and directs her choice of a lover by the weight of his purse and the extent of his possessions. All the images of rustic grandeur which knowledge can command, and all the advantages, and they are not few, which gold can give, are passed in glittering review before her, and are contrasted, by the malice of ancient wit, with the sorrows of poverty—with an empty coffer and a cold hearth, the constant

accompaniments of inconsiderate love. Gold, in the estimation of this grave monitor, becomes, like the cestus of the goddess,

> An ambush of sweet snares, replete
> With love, desire, soft intercourse of hearts,
> And music of resistless whisper'd sounds,
> Which from the wisest steal their best resolves.

In a similar strain of prudence, yet with something of a sarcastic sneer, Allan Ramsay sings:

> There's meikle good love in bonds and bags,
> And gold and silver's a sweet complexion;
> And wit, and worth, and virtue in rags,
> Have tint the art of gaining affection.

And Robert Burns, whose "o'erword" was not always "Prudence," sings still more seriously,

> O thoughtless lassie! life's a fight:
> The canniest gate the darke is sair;
> And aye fu' handed fighting's best—
> A hungry care's an unco care.

While the author of Tibbie Fowler concludes his satiric song with all the bitterness of a disappointed admirer:

> Be a lassie e'er so black,
> Gin she hae the name of siller,
> Set her up on Tintoc tap,
> The wind will blow a man 'till her.

At the head of this sober kind of song, since Ramsay and Burns belong to the higher departments, I can with great propriety place Miss Jenny Grahame, the authoress of a very clever lyric called "A Mother's Advice to her Son." This lady, indeed, puts no spicery in the cup of wedlock, and has by heart, like the fifth husband of the Wife of Bath, all the evil chances, sacred and profane, which marriage has brought on man. To these she adds the caution of proverbs and the precepts of experience. I would advise any youth, who has not perfect confidence in his own capacity of judging for himself, to avoid singing, as he goes to be married, the sorrows which this Dumfries lady has discovered under the joys with which Hymen, as with roses, has strewed the bridal couch. I may add of this lady, that she has left a very respectable fame behind her for humour and for naïveté. I wish she had left some more songs: our district has not overflowed with lyric verse, and with the exception of the author of "There's nae luck about the house," my native county has no claim upon me for the character of a lyric poet of any note or eminence.

REV. JOHN SKINNER.

Of the songs of John Skinner those most popular are Tullochgorum and John of Badenyon: the first is gay and sprightly: the second belongs to that monitory class which to the interest of a pleasant story adds two or three words of good counsel in a manner between the

grave and the humorous. The one will always be more or less popular, from the life and animation it lends to the air with which it is united; and the other has an equal chance to endure, since youth with enthusiasm and hope will often read its own story in the disappointments of its hero, and seek similar consolation in its own bosom, or, as many interpret the song, in the meek and quiet repose of religion. But the Muse of Skinner had the same infirmity as that of Ross, or had the same hope of a patient audience; she sings with so much satisfaction to herself, that she knows not when to stop; and if all lyric bards were to sing in the same lengthened strain, the world, if it did justice to all, would find no time for graver pursuits. This practice of prolonging our delight till even delight becomes painful belongs more peculiarly to the Muse of the north of Scotland; and the name of Geddes may be added to that of Skinner and Ross, as an instance of encouraging a story to grow beyond the bounds within which all lyric poetry should be restrained, to which the melody of music is intended to be added. The "Wee, wee Wifiekie" of Geddes, like the "Ewie and her crooked Horn" of Skinner, though longer than a willing singer would wish it, is altogether a very humorous performance, and I should not like to be the person who grew tired while it was either singing or reciting. Burns was a warm admirer of the songs of Skinner; but all the praise which the living lavish on the living, I am afraid, must be taken with some abatement. "Tullochgorum," he says, "is the best Scotch song Scotland ever saw." There is certainly a dance of

words, and great animation; but, to understand the compliment, we ought to know whether the poet ranked it in reference to all, or according to its kind. I certainly should not place it at the head, or near the head, of Scottish song; yet I hope no one will take advantage of my candour when I say, that I know not what I might have done had Skinner lived now, and expressed himself as favourably of some of my verses as he did of those of Burns. A man's vanity rises in arms against his judgment, and it is well that it is so: he must be very deficient in enthusiasm whose judgment is always clear; and he would make but a sorry friend who said only what he thought, and estimated all with the gravity of one sitting in judgment.

ALEXANDER SKIRVING.

Of Alexander Skirving, author of "The Chevalier being void of fear," I cannot well say the half I know, or I know not when we should have done with laughing; for besides his gift at song-making, which was considerable, he was one of the wittiest and most whimsical of mankind. Much of this peculiar character is visible in his song where he sings of the contest between the rebel and royal forces like one regardless of the result, who scorned one side and mocked the other, and derided them both together,—and received the reward of all such candour, for one party picked his pocket, and the other expressed a desire to shoot him. It was

for a long while the only song concerning those struggles which could be sung without giving offence to either side, and was and still is immensely popular; yet this popularity cannot last: like all other verses which are made on passing events, it must be content to fade gradually away from the recollection, as the battle which it celebrates grows more distant, and its allusions begin to be forgotten. It has still, however, a long lease of fame, for the memories of the north are very tenacious; and an event which shook the kingdom, and filled so many families with mourning, will be often dwelt upon by the old, and recalled by the young. This spirit for poetry and humour was inherited by his son Archibald, a drawer of characters both with pencil and pen; whose history, and opinions, and verses, and paintings, would fill a volume, and a volume too that would deserve to live.

JOHN LOWE.

They who wish well to the fame of John Lowe may wish him known only by the pathetic song of "Mary's Dream;" but other poetry has gone abroad, and though its inferiority lessens not the excellence of that exquisite production, it very materially impairs our opinion of the original powers of the author. He was indeed a lover and a writer of verses from his youth; and if we may credit the oral testimony of the peasantry of his native place, some of his early songs are still lingering among the Galloway mountains. But he was only once a true poet, and probably never once a true lover; and the coy-

ness of the Muse was only equalled by his inconstancy as a man. In the song of "Mary's Dream" he tells the story of a youth who perished at sea; and the heroine dreams or imagines she sees the form, and hears the voice, of her lover announcing his untimely fate. It is no abatement of the beauty of the song to be told, as I have been, that the same story was current in prose before John Lowe was born; nor can I consent to suppose his fame at all lessened, even were it proved, as I have heard it very strongly asserted, that it is only a revisal and improvement of an older production. I have known men's memories play them strange tricks in the antiquity of song, and I receive all such assurances with hesitation and doubt. It is the duty of a poet not to invent superstitious beliefs, but to use them according to their peculiar spirit; and he who first gives them a poetic dress, and employs them for the purpose of embellishing a true love story, has ever been held from the days of Homer as the original proprietor. In the same manner, should a poet find the fragments of some ancient and departing strain, if he gather them together, and shed over them the reviving dews of his own fancy and feelings, till they become a fair and a living body, I know not why his merit should be reckoned inferior to that of its first creator. This, or something like this, was my answer to a gentleman who told me he was present when one of the young ladies of Airds went to the kirk with her bridegroom, and while the young men were whispering and naming her for the heroine of Mary's Dream, an old man came forward, and assured them that he had sung the

song when a boy, and that it was an old song then. But whether old or new, or more probably a mixture of both, it bids fair to continue a favourite; and I scarcely know a song that contains so many popular qualities—a moving tale with all its natural and supernatural accompaniments, steeped in a stream of melody.

The claim of Logan to the sweet song of the Cuckoo, the claim of Hamilton to one brilliant speech, and of John Lowe to one exquisite song, have all been disputed; though nothing can be surer than their several rights—yet the world cannot well be blamed for entertaining suspicions. When we see a song written in a free and a noble spirit, and hear a speech eloquent and flowing, logical and persuasive, and know that the other productions of the poet are cold and spiritless, and that the orator never spoke another word worthy of notice, we imagine they have begged or borrowed their honours, and unwillingly allow them the credit of having had one solitary fit of inspiration, one short visit from the Muse of poetry or eloquence. When Burns speaks of Lowe, he says he read a poetic letter of his from America, to a young lady, which seemed to relate to love; the great poet often speaks hastily, and is often wrong where one word of inquiry might have set him right: but though he calls John, Alexander, he was right to treat that cold, and heartless, and conceited epistle, with contempt or indifference. A man who retracts his promise and revokes his vows for no better reason than his own inconstancy is a contemptible scoundrel, and yet he becomes still more abject and pitiable when he sits coolly down to

clothe his villany in verse, to polish his own hardness of heart, and to give the wings of poetry to his own infamy, that it may fly over the world and proclaim it east and west. That Lowe's vanity was greater than his want of principle cannot well be doubted, since it obliged him to reveal his own dishonour: we read his lines with pain and dismiss them with contempt, and scarcely afford a sigh for the disastrous close of his life. But family shame, and disappointed hope, and the bitterness, it may be, of self-reproach, revenged the cause of injured love, and laid him in an untimely grave.—Let those who desire to part with him in peace read his Mary's Dream, a song which few have equalled and none excelled.

WILLIAM JULIUS MICKLE.

Were I to say that the lyrical fame of Mickle depended on that very fascinating song, "There's nae luck about the house," I should do him a manifest injustice. That he is chiefly known in the north as the author of that song only is very true, and it was but lately his claim was ascertained as surely as all such dubious things can be: but he is also the author of some dozen and a half of the sweetest ballads in the collection of Mr. Evans. The poet, indeed, had no wish to own these hasty and somewhat unequal productions; and, with a desire to let them win their way as the works of the antique Muse, he encumbered their language with all the idle garnishing of superfluous letters. Now, if one

quote, or pretend to quote, from some old manuscript, such embarrassments to the reader may be defended; but all oral or remembered things must come stript of idle letters—their presence betrays the imposture. Throughout the whole number there is a family resemblance, and they are all alike marked as the offspring of a tender heart; their descriptions are simple and graphic, their sentiments natural and affecting. They are all emblazoned, too, with old manners, and old customs, and old deeds, in the spirit with which a true poet will employ his antiquarian knowledge. I am glad of this opportunity of rendering back to departed genius the ornaments of which it too carelessly despoiled itself; and it may be a warning to many who imagine they can estimate their own capacity and decide what works of theirs posterity will honour: for in my opinion his hastiest effusions are his best, and in those heroic and romantic legends he breathed out a far more free and natural strain than in some of his more elaborate productions.

Of his "Nae luck about the house" I am obliged to speak, and I speak unwillingly, for I confess I am not quite satisfied with his claims of authorship. He has written nothing else in the peculiar style of that composition, and we know that the reputation of having written it was long enjoyed by another. Now the claim of Mickle depends on the conclusion which we may choose to draw from the fact of the song, with variations, being found in his handwriting. Many of the songs which Burns transcribed, or dressed up for the Museum, have

been mistaken for his own compositions: and in like manner, Mickle may unwittingly have made another person's song his own, which he had only sought to correct or embellish. These, after all, are but doubts;—doubts which every one is free to express who feels them. He has made out a better claim to the merit of writing that delightful song than any other person; and since it is an old favourite now, and as all knowledge of its origin may be fairly reckoned to be departed, I am ready to believe that it owes to him most of those charms by which it cannot fail to captivate attention, so long as the happiest language in which truth and nature can be expressed has any sway over men's hearts.

JOHN LOGAN.

While the songs of some other poets have risen into a popularity which they hardly seem to deserve, those of Logan have by no means received such notice as their merits claim. As the author of the Ode to the Cuckoo, his name stands justly high; the sweetness, the neatness, and concise beauty of that composition, cannot well be rivalled; yet it must not be disguised that many assign it to Michael Bruce, a young poet, who, though he died in the blossom of his hope, has received some compensation by the general sympathy with which his name is regarded, and by the fame that his promise, rather than his performance, has obtained. I confess, in a matter of gratuitous conjecture, I cannot see why

we should impeach the testimony of Logan in his own favour; or why he was incapable of producing such a strain, when he had written some which fairly rival it. Are we to suppose, because he introduced into the works of Bruce some of his own poetry without acknowledging it, that at the same time he privately and basely taxed the productions of his friend to grace his own future works? I cannot believe it, and till I see more reason I will not. If he was sweet, and neat, and concise in the ode to the Cuckoo, he was not less so in some of his other lyrics: he united great sensibility with great nicety of judgment, his style was free and flowing, and his felicitous brevity of expression was favourable to lyric composition.

His taste, however, was not always accurate, and his lyrics are sometimes infected with the Arcadian plague of shepherds and shepherdesses. The idly feigned poetic pains of imaginary personages make little impression on the multitude; and a song, which gives back to the heart or eye of the singer nothing of either nature or manners, has a small chance for lasting admiration. I always distrust the excellence of verse which, professing to look like nature, is too fine and too beautiful for the comprehension of the commonalty. The princesses and gentlemen of pastoral verse would think the primeval curse had fallen upon them were they transported from their balmy groves and blooming fields to a wild hill side among the mountains of Scotland. But Logan is no frequent sinner in the pastoral style; and the beauty of his verses on Yarrow Braes has many admirers who

forget, in the pathetic flow, that he ever sighed at the feet of a shepherdess, or heard the note of the nightingale north of the Tweed. It is singular what affection genius has long entertained for the little stream of Yarrow, and how many gifted spirits have united to celebrate it. Yet beautiful as many of the lyrics are which shed their enchantments on its bank and stream, I am not sure but that the most sweetly beautiful are not native at all, being breathed from southern dales. When will my native stream of Nith obtain or deserve the distinction of such strains as the Yarrow Unvisited, or the Yarrow Visited, of Wordsworth?

ROBERT BURNS.

A lyric poet, with more than the rustic humour and exact truth of Ramsay, with simplicity surpassing Crawford's, and native elegance exceeding Hamilton's, and with a genius which seemed to unite all the distinguishing excellencies of our elder lyrics, appeared in Robert Burns. He was the first who brought deep passion to the service of the lyric Muse, who added sublimity to simplicity, and found grace and elegance among the cottages of his native land. The beauty and the variety of his songs, their tenderness and truth, their pathetic sweetness, their unextinguishable humour, their noble scorn of whatever is mean and vile, and their deep sympathy with the feelings of humble worth, are felt by all; and acknowledged by all. His original power, and his

happy spirit, were only equalled by his remarkable gift of entering into the characters of our ancient songs, and the skill with which he abated their indelicacy, or eked out their imperfections. No one felt more fondly the presence of beauty, could express admiration, hope, or desire, in more glowing language, or sing of the calm joys of wedded love, or the unbounded rapture of single hearts and mutual affection, with equal force or felicity. All his songs are distinguished more or less by a happy carelessness, by a bounding elasticity of spirit, a singular and natural felicity of expression, by the ardour of an enthusiastic heart, and the vigour of a clear understanding. He had the rare gift of expressing himself according to the rank and condition of mankind, the stateliness of matron pride, the modesty of virgin affection, the querulousness of old age, and the overflowing enthusiasm and vivacity of youth. His simplicity is the simplicity of strength: he is never mean, never weak, seldom vulgar, and but rarely coarse; and his unrivalled power of clothing his thoughts in happy and graceful language never forsakes him. Capricious and wayward as his musings sometimes are, mingling the moving with the comic, and the sarcastic with the solemn, all he says is above the mark of other men—he sheds a redeeming light on all he touches; whatever his eye glances on rises into life and beauty, and stands consecrated and imperishable. His language is familiar, yet dignified, careless, yet concise; and he touches on the most perilous or ordinary themes with a skill so rare and felicitous, that good fortune seems to unite with good

taste in carrying him over the mire of rudeness and vulgarity, in which, since his time, so many inferior spirits have wallowed. His love, his enthusiasm, his devotion, his humour, his domestic happiness, and his homeliest joy, is every where characterised by a brief and elegant simplicity, at once easy to him and unattainable to others. No one has such power in adorning the humble, and dignifying the plain, and in extracting sweet and impassioned poetry from the daily occurrences of human life: his simplicity is without childishness, his affection without exaggeration, and his sentiment without conceit.

The influence which the genius of Burns has obtained over the heart of Scotland is indeed great, and promises to be lasting. He alarms, it is true, very sensitive and fastidious persons, by the freedom of his speculations and the masculine vigour of his mode of expression; but these are rather the casual lapses of the Muse, the overflowings of an ardent heart and unwearied fancy, and a love of vivid illustration, than a defect of principle, or an imperfection of taste. Like a fine race-horse, he cannot always stop at the winning-post; like a beautiful stream, he sometimes overflows the banks; and his genius resembles more a tree run wild, than one trimmed and pruned to decorate a garden walk. When speaking of his prospect of future fame to a friend, he said he depended chiefly on his songs for the continuance of his name; and his decision seems correct. Not but that I think, in all his earlier poems, he displays greater force and freedom of genius than he any where exhibits in his lyrics; but then these brief

and bright effusions are learned by heart—are confided to the memories of the people—and come down from generation to generation without the aid of the press or the pen, to which longer and more deliberate productions must be trusted. In this way alone would many of the best of Burns's songs be preserved, perhaps his humorous lyrics the longest—we naturally prefer mirth to sorrow: the source of tears is deeper than that of laughter; and duller heads and less sensible hearts, which could not partake in his emotions of tenderness and sublimity, would assist in preserving whatever increased the joy of a bridal feast, or the merriment of rustic festivity.

But with all his impassioned eloquence in the presence of beauty, with his power of exciting emotions at will, whether of pleasure or of pity, and with all his delight in what is lovely and inspiring, he had little of that elevated and refined spirit which contemplates beauty with awe, and approaches it with reverence. Of this pure glory and hallowed light his lyrics possess nothing. The midnight tryste and the stolen interview—the rapture to meet, and the anguish to part—the whisper in the dark—and all the lavish spirit of nocturnal enjoyment, correspond more with the warmth than the elevation of love. He looked not on loveliness as on a pure and an awful thing: he drew no magic circle of lofty and romantic thought round those he loved, which could not be passed without lowering them from stations little lower than the angels; but he clasps them in his arms, and lavishes on their condescension all the

rapture of unrefined joy. His rapture is without romance; and to the charms of his compositions he has not added that of chivalry. He has no distant mode of salutation—he seeks the couch rather than approaches the footstool of beauty; and the sparkling wine, the private chamber, and the "pulse's maddening play," are to him that inspiration which devouter minds have invoked by prayer and humiliation. When one of the ladies who had felt the sorcery of his conversation as well as of his Muse said, with more naïveté than delicacy, that no man's eloquence ever carried her so completely off her feet as that of Burns, she expressed, very happily, that influence which the passionate language of poetry has over a susceptible heart: but still this fails to let us into the secret of the charms he used; and the lady may have lost her self-command by the witchery of a gross as well as an aerial eloquence. But if he was not under the spell of chivalry in the intercourses of love, he was occasionally under an influence which sobered down the selfish impetuosity of passion—which imparted a meekness to his joy, and a reverence to his language. I am willing to believe that a deep feeling of devotion, constant in his youth, and flashing back on him by fits and starts during the period of his short but glorious career, interposed to hallow his thoughts, and restrain that torrent of passion which overflowed in all his productions.

He laid down rules for lyric composition which he did not always observe, and seemed willing to restrain others from pruning the luxuriance, or improving the

sentiment, or heightening the story, of ancient song, while he was ready to indulge in it himself. Of the many fine songs which he wrote, a large proportion are either avowedly or evidently conceived in the spirit, and executed in the feeling, of others: he retouched many, restored many, and remodelled many; but he retouched few without improving them, restored none without increasing their beauty, and remodelled none without introducing some of those electric touches of delicacy, or humour, or tenderness, for which he is so remarkable. It would extend to a great length the character which I am endeavouring to draw, were I to seek to justify my assertion by an examination into all the sources from which he gathered the materials of song—or to point out fragments which he completed, verses from which he borrowed, or songs which he imitated. He seemed, indeed, to take particular delight in completing the old and imperfect songs of his native country: without much old world lore, with no great thirst of research, without any particular sympathy for the old simple style of our ballads, he has exercised his fancy and displayed his taste among the reliques of ancient song to a greater extent than is generally known. Though nature is exhaustless, I must confess that Burns, who is somewhat little less than nature herself, appears to have felt at last the decay of fancy in the service to which his love of Scottish music called him. To expect that a spirit so wayward could endure, year after year, to measure out lyric verse according to the prescription of all manner of melodies, is to me sur-

prising. That he could stay till he entered into the feeling of the air—till he extracted from bagpipers and fiddlers all their varieties of the melody which was to be united to verse; and then make a notorious sacrifice of vigorous meaning to empty music, and endure the criticism of men, whose skill in the science of sound was less to be disputed than in the science of sense, is one of those instances of condescension and willing humiliation which are unfrequent in the history of Robert Burns.

ROBERT TANNAHILL.

The man who breaks out from the fulness of his heart into voluntary numbers, and seeks relief in poesie from the matter with which he overflows, is a poet of nature's own handiwork; and we may expect from him a free and original strain, and some addition to the stock of popular pleasure. The rods of the false magicians wrought their enchantments as well as the rod of the prophet; and we have much poetry which comes from a lower source than inspiration; but the enchantments which the false magicians wrought could not stand, since they were not of God; and the poetry which is laboured out by mechanical skill alone cannot survive, since it springs not from nature. With the finest ear and the nicest skill in language, and with learning lending knowledge and power, a man cannot write true poetry; for all these acquirements will only

carry him to where poesie begins; and though he may speak with the voice of the Muse, her heart, which warms, and animates, and exalts, will be absent; and though his aspirations may be correct and melodious, they will want the curious ease and happiness of natural poetry. He will give no fresh impulse to our feelings; he will add no new joy to the stock of the old: he will but re-echo more impressive sounds which have been heard before; give a new look to an old sentiment; and flourish in the faded flowers and the tarnished finery of verse.

Though I have no hesitation in admitting Tannahill to the fellowship of the born spirits of lyric verse, and in acknowledging his right to take rank with some of our popular song writers, I am not so ready to allow him the rare merit of originality which some have boldly claimed for him, nor am I prepared to believe that he has equalled Burns, or even approached him, either in pathos or in passion, in true love or in tenderness, in spirit or in humour. His songs, which are numerous, are chiefly remarkable for the nicety and skill with which they are measured out to re-echo the airs to which they are sung: they have been composed by one entirely possessed by the melody to which he wished to wed his verse; and this I am afraid has lessened the ardour of the poet, while he solicited words and distributed them out by the suggestion of sound. They name the name of love indeed, but they express none of its deep emotions: they speak of imaginary pains, and present us with midnight interviews; but there is

little of the overflowing affection of youthful hearts; if they speak, they speak what other lovers have said before them; they meet without rapture, and part without passion. His songs are descriptions of scenery rather than pictures of true love; the subject of his verse is lost in the exuberant luxuriance of landscape; and he is so anxious to leave no tree, or stream, or flower unsung, that he fairly buries the painting in the framework. It would be unjust to deny that some of his happiest songs are excellent after their kind; but they are excellent after the manner of others: he has discovered no new region of delight into which he could take the votaries of song; the ways in which he leads them go through no enchanted or untrodden ground; and he lives rather in the neighbourhood of the Muse than in her company.

This absence of some of the chief charms of lyric verse in the compositions of Tannahill may be sought in his way of life—in his love of singing to suit the tastes of a club of west-country wits, rather than in obeying the dictates of his own heart. It is idle to listen to the calls of others, unless the poet feels the call within himself; what he produces to rule and measure will look like a paste gem beside a diamond, when compared with those unbidden and unsolicited strains which gush up from time to time from the recesses of his own bosom. The coldness of his love compels him to seize on every descriptive circumstance to swell the amount of his verses—auxiliaries become principals—and the subordinate parts usurp the foreground. The west of Scot-

land seemed to imagine, that having produced Burns, it was destined to produce, at stated periods, a succession of humble bards endowed with genius like that of its favourite son. Tannahill was therefore hailed as a star at least, under the influence of the planet Burns; and the glimmerings of his weak and inconstant light were looked upon as the dawn of something more full and resplendent. But with a kind heart, and considerable poetic power, he was unequal to the task of consoling the west country for the untimely fate of Burns; and what for himself was far more unfortunate, he wanted firmness of mind, and independent pride of heart, and proud consciousness of genius, to support him against the cold regard of the world; and having written to please others rather than to gratify himself, he was not prepared for evil fortune, but sank under mortified ambition and disappointed hope.

The fall of this young poet presents a lesson for those to read who imagine that the gift of genius and all its accompanying sensibilities is a blessing and a pleasure: it is indeed a blessing, when it comes with corresponding power of mind and excellence of judgment; when he who possesses it can form a proper estimate of his own capabilities; can prepare himself for the insolence of criticism and the neglect of the world; and can answer scorn with scorn, and find in his own heart abundance of consolation;—when with the wisdom which swayed Burns, he sings to please himself, the surest way to please others. But it is a curse and a torment when it is bestowed alone, and good judgment is with-

held: like a ship with more sail than ballast, or a startled bird in the dark, it will sink in the waves, or flutter to death; or, like the wild steed of which Lord Byron has so exquisitely sung, it will gallop till it burst its heart. I should be one of the last to ask for genius the protection of the great; but in the case of Tannahill a little patronage might have been spared—for little would have done; and the shame of sending him in poverty and in sorrow to an untimely grave would not then have been added to the national reproach which the history of the inimitable Burns has brought on our country.

RICHARD GALL.

Richard Gall is a sweet and melodious writer, easy and flowing; but his flow is without depth, his sweetness without strength; and with all his ease he scatters none of those careless graces—gives us none of those electric touches which awaken new trains of association, and introduce us to new pleasures. His songs have been read and sung; but they want the power of remaining on the memory as a charm: they are not better than others of the same character which have preceded them; they give no new turn to thought; they embellish the oft-told tale of love with no original imagery; and they offer no new incense at the shrine of beauty. He looks, with Burns, on the daisy, over which he has trod—but no sublime and moral emotion arises in

his mind; and he looks on the mouse hastening from the ruin of its stubble nest—but it awakens no images of terror or of pity: the one is but a weed, and the other but a mouse—and so they are to the mass of mankind. I accuse him not of being insensible to the charms of nature, and to the presence of beauty; for his verses entitle him to rank with those who could strike off a fac-simile of what is visible to the eye. He can see, but he cannot imagine; he thinks of spring like a farmer, and sees in the earth, whose bosom is heaving with new life, only the hope of a good crop of corn. In his love he is quiet and tranquil; his joy is moderate, and his sorrow is without tears. I cannot give him greater praise, and therefore I will spare him any farther censure.

HECTOR MACNEILL.

Of all ladies Fame is the most fascinating and faithless: she will smile on a man to his face, run with her light before him, and blow her trumpet at his approach; but the moment he is gone, and the green sod is above him, she extinguishes her torch, casts her trumpet aside, and forgets his name with as little remorse as the buxom wife of Bath forgot that of her third husband when she meditated her fourth marriage. Yet she is not always so unjust and inconstant. There are others to whom she was frugal of her smiles, and whose names she seldom pronounced while they lived; but over whose graves she scatters her flowers, and sounds her trumpet, and

whom she summons men to admire with all the fervour of a virgin who has lost her love, or of a wife bereaved of the husband of her heart. In which of these situations Hector Macniell stands it requires little skill to determine. I remember, when a boy, the numerous editions of his songs and his tales, the applause they received, and the fame which they brought the author. No fame was ever so suddenly achieved; no praise was ever so loudly proclaimed: and yet what reputation has experienced so great a fall?—what poet would think it praise to be told that he sang like the author of "Come under my Plaidie," or "My Boy Tammy?" Yet Scotland welcomed him as she never welcomed man before. —To see in "Will and Jean" a spirit worthy of ranking with Burns, or of outrivalling that truly vigorous and Hogarthian production, "Watty and Meg," was a delusion such as never fell on the eyes of man since the spell in the wizard's book, which made a cockle-shell seem a gilded barge.

Of his songs some account must be given, and his songs are the best of his works. They have much softness and truth, an insinuating grace of manner, and a decorum of expression, with no small skill in the dramatic management of the stories—for they are all conceived in the express character of our popular lyrics. They are innocent and strictly moral: his Muse is no leaper and dancer—she never runs half breathless in the twilight round the ricks of hay, nor laughs in the dark, but conducts herself with a propriety worthy of a better inspiration. But who, in the pursuit of na-

tural ease of expression, simple energy of thought and concise purity of language, ever made such marvellous mistakes as the author of My Boy Tammy? He mistakes the chirping of the grasshopper for the voice of the eagle—the gliding of the brook for the heaving of the ocean—and the tongue of a school-boy, expressing a sneaking regard for curds and cream, for the voice of a man uttering the language of love. His simplicity is utter weakness, and neither man nor woman nor child could speak so far below the mark of manhood as some of the swains of Macniell. The very idea of falling in love implies a conscious manliness—a sense that wit and form are grown nigh to man's estate: but what mother, with either a mother's anxious heart or intrepid tongue, would ask a son who had the sense to seek a wife such silly questions as the mother of Tammy? and what son that had any hope of a beard would have replied in the words of that harmless simpleton?

There is perhaps no grace in lyric composition so difficult to attain as simple grace of expression: but simplicity implies the presence of sense and wit, and is accompanied by strength, and gives depth to pathos and force to humour. But to separate the poetry from the prose of life, as honey is gathered from the weed, and to pluck the sweetest flowers of poesie from among the thorns and brambles of humble life, was a flight beyond the power of Macniell. There is a rich and a noble simplicity—but there is also a poor and a mean simplicity; and as vulgarity is often mistaken for rustic elegance, so is meanness of language for elevation and strength. When

he imagines he imitates the language of innocence, he becomes tame and ludicrous; and instead of rivalling the homely strength and agreeable naïveté of the ancient songs, he produces a lyric unworthy of soothing children. He seems to have mistaken human nature, and seeks among a shrewd and a keen-sighted people to renew the age of gold and the language of helplessness and ignorance. His "Come under my Plaidie" is a story which was found without the cost of invention; it is the common tale of a woman, fond of fine dresses and soft beds, preferring age and riches to youth and poverty: but it is told without humour; and the author neither increases our mirth nor excites our scorn by an adventure, in telling which, no one save himself could have escaped doing both.

REV. WILLIAM MOREHEAD.

The men of Galloway of old claimed and enjoyed the dangerous honour of composing the vanguard of the royal armies of Scotland, and for many centuries confined their ambition to this often-envied distinction: they claimed no other honours, and were satisfied with the silent fame which industry and hospitality added. Though living in wild and picturesque regions, their pastoral hills and romantic streams, their poetic superstitions and their lovely women, never elevated them into verse; so that, unlike the natives of the neighbouring counties, they have few remains of literary glory to show. In

song, the spontaneous offspring of the heart, they have, till of late, produced little; and were we to withdraw from the great joint stock of national pleasure all the songs which the men of Galloway have contributed, who would be sensible of the diminution? In truth, the lyric authors of that extensive district, having each of them produced one good song, seem to have exhausted their powers; or, like the corncrake, whose first cry in the season is sweet, but whose single and invariable note becomes palling and monotonous, we cannot endure the continuance of their strains, since, like echoes, they become fainter and less distinct than the original sound.

There is one Galloway song, however, a production of very singular merit, which, if not quite original in conception, is original in execution, and cannot well be spared from among our national lyrics: its loss would be like rending a green bough from a living tree—I mean "Bess the Gawkie." William Morehead, the author, was minister of the parish of Urr, in Galloway: he was a vigilant and able professor, and a man of ready wit and gay keen humour. That he was the author, I had the assurance of my Father—a man fond of collecting all that was characteristic of his country, and possessing a warm heart, lively fancy, benevolent humour, and pleasant happy wit. To him I owe much of the information concerning song which I have scattered over these pages; and in all things connected with our national poetry, so much did our tastes correspond, that in recording my own opinions I am only expressing his. A poet himself, and a correct judge of poetry, his curiosity was unbounded and his

reading extensive. He had by heart many an historical and romantic tradition, many a moving story, and many an ancient verse; and so well did he feel, and so happily could he utter what others wrote, that I have heard many say they would rather hear him read songs than others sing them. With Morehead he was personally acquainted, and he also knew Nathaniel Mackay, the minister of Crossmichael, who, he informed me, was the author of "Nae Dominies for me, Laddie"—a clever but unequal song. All my inquiries, and they have not been few, confirm his assurance.

Bess the Gawkie is a song of original merit, lively without extravagance, and gay without grossness—the simplicity is elegant, and the naïveté scarcely rivalled. The maiden's complaint of the numerous caresses of her lover—"O Jamie, ye ha'e monie ta'en," is the reproof of one pleased and innocent; and the triumphant taunts of Bess, and her concluding song of merry indifference, cannot readily be matched. That Morehead wrote nothing more, having written once so ably, is very strange. How he contrived to disobey that great internal call, that craving of the heart and the fancy to break out into voluntary song—an impulse which men call inspiration, surpasses my understanding. Morehead, Lowe, Mackay, and others—all men of Galloway, all poets, are all single-song men, but Morehead is the most original; and as his writing has increased our rational amusement, I am sorry he did so little for us, when he could do it so well.

ALEXANDER WILSON.

Alexander Wilson is well known as the author of one of our most popular rustic poems, Watty and Meg. In his homely and vigorous style, his scorn of all ornament, his directness of purpose, and his rough energy, he stands opposed to Macniell; and he is likewise opposed to him in matter as well as in manner, for his song is of mirth augmented by liquor, of public-house pastime and tumultuous joy, of the fury of female passion and domestic infelicity. He scorns douce morality and regular decorum, and loves to hear the pint-stoups clatter amid

Laughing, sangs, and lasses' skirls.

He has been excelled by none in lively graphic fidelity of touch: whatever was present to his eye, and manifest to his ear, he could paint with a life and a humour which Burns seems alone to rival; but in all the higher qualities of the poet he was decidedly inferior—he had none of those sudden bursts, as of lightning from a cloud, which kindle us up and exalt and lift us above the earth. What he beheld he could describe, but what he found low he could not raise; he could run on the ground, but he could not ascend: while manners and men sat for their pictures, he could paint; but he was unable to speculate upon human character and action, and his skill lay in augmenting mirth rather than in moving to pity or to tears.

His genius merited a happier fate than to be exiled

among the deserts of North America. He undertook a work of great labour—the American Ornithology; and with his gun, and his pencil, and his pen, he traversed forests, skirted mountains, crossed rivers, and at last perished from anxiety of mind and fatigue of body, from unrewarded industry and ungratified hope.

SIR ALEXANDER BOSWELL.

With a deeper relish than most men for humour and wit, and with a spirit sprightly, elate, and companionable, Sir Alexander Boswell had not the happiest art of communicating his emotions to song; his mirth seems forced, and his humour wants readiness of motion—it is more cumbrous than keen. He inherited from nature much constitutional glee, and had an accurate eye for measuring the whims and the follies of mankind; but the wit and the humour, which shake the company's sides when the wine goes round, have seldom flowed into song. The wit which comes at the call of merry companionship, and the wit which attends on meditation, may be of the same species; but the one is perishable, and the other enduring.—To shine in conversation is one thing, and in verse another, though the poetic element belongs to both. To Boswell's aid the Muse seems to have come with reluctance—he wishes to be witty and to be humorous, but his wit is not happy, and his humour wants ease and grace. His want of success arises not from unwillingness to descend to the region of rustic

merriment; the truth is, he sometimes descends too far, and laughs himself, whilst he fails to move others.

His song of "Jenny's Bawbee," partly the renovation of an ancient lyric, is lively and satirical, and has obtained public favour. Jenny draws up her suitors in ludicrous array, and touches off their characters with much acuteness; but there is little that is new, and less that is happy—the humour is the humour of situation only: we laugh, but it is at the ludicrous predicament in which some of the lovers are placed, not at the sallies of humour with which they are assailed. His "Auld Gudeman, ye're a drucken Carle," is natural and diverting; and we cannot avoid smiling at the union of folly and age in the old pair, or at their hasty quarrel and hastier reconciliation. The whole is, however, somewhat vulgar: the simplicity has been praised, though it is bald and ordinary; all may be simple that is natural, but all that is natural is not elegant.

Boswell's heroic songs are few; there is some ardour in the way in which he summons his heroes to the field, but he has drawn no new picture of heroic enthusiasm, he has thrown in no martial mirth, no unexpected pathos. He knows what he ought to do—he aims at it, but he wants the patience or the art to stamp off with vigour or life his own conceptions. I am grieved to think that his life, a valuable one to his lady and his children, was cast away in a dispute about an idle verse: his blood ought not to have been spilt, save in a graver quarrel than could arise from the end of a foolish song. I feel more

for him who survives than for him who perished; he cannot always have a hot brow and a determined hand.

I now bid farewell to the acknowledged authors of Scottish song. Though I am sensible of having omitted some whose reputation many may think might have secured them a place, and admitted others whose genius some may question, I cannot accuse myself of having excluded any whose works bear the mark of original spirit, nor included any whose genius seems doubtful. I might have swelled the amount of lyric poets with the names of some to whom obscure traditional testimony assigns a few of our favourite songs, but I thought it best to be silent where I could not be sure. There is still, however, a class of authors to whom we are largely indebted for an ever-increasing stock of lyric pleasure, and to whom we owe many songs of first-rate beauty and excellence—I mean the anonymous authors, who, like nightingales, are satisfied with charming us without being seen, and whom we may question as Wordsworth so beautifully questions the bird of summer:

> O Cuckoo, may I call thee bird,
> Or but a wandering voice?

To this source of lyric pleasure I have to acknowledge myself indebted for as deep a knowledge of those strains of pathos or humour which the heart of Scotland breathes, as to the works of known poets; and they who desire

to form an estimate of the varied genius of our national songs must make themselves familiar with many verses of mirth or sadness to which no author's name can be added. We owe them, I imagine, more to the unlettered than to the educated Muse, to the hasty or vagrant impulse of some bright or clouded moment of human life, when the heart could no longer contain itself, from its fulness of sorrow or of joy. They seem all of one family, and they involve all the defects and excellences of our known poets; they have a meekness in their mirth, a modesty in their love, a calmness in their sorrow, a quiet humour, and a gravity amid their most extravagant strains, which give us an image of the nation. Yet in many parts they possess a very peculiar and striking beauty, altogether their own, or which they share not to any very prominent extent with others— I mean the religious awe which is breathed so softly through some of our rudest lyrics. Amid the throbbings of mutual love, or round the hearth of domestic affection, this devout feeling circulates; and yet it is employed with such happy skill, that religion rather lends grace than character, rather embellishes by allusion than by a more direct mode—she becomes the auxiliary rather than the principal. This singular union seems perfectly consistent with the character of the nation—it is a species of religious chivalry; and in its presence warmth never overflows into indelicacy, nor simplicity of expression into coarseness or vulgarity.

Of the living authors of lyric verse it is my wish to

be silent—personal esteem might mingle with my criticisms; and while I imagined myself judging with candour, and estimating with care, I might only be recording my own affections and partialities. I might, indeed, praise the rapidity, the fire and martial animation of the author of Marmion, the elegance and pathos of Campbell, and the witty grace and native tenderness of Joanna Baillie—I might say there was much truth and much nature in James Hogg, and that if Lockhart sang as freely and warmly of the chivalry of Scotland as of the Moors and Spaniards, his name would be one of the foremost in lyric verse.

Of the songs which I have myself written—out of many I have admitted a few, and these are mostly such as had already escaped from my hand, and found their way as old or new compositions into a variety of collections. Were I to admit many, men might accuse me of vanity in seeking place too readily for my own among the works of more gifted spirits; and were I to exclude all, I should be open to the charge of idle pride, or ridiculous affectation. I am not even sure that I shall escape the censure of malevolent criticism in the middle course I have pursued: my wish in this was to please others rather than to gratify myself, for where could I wish my songs to be but among those of my native land?

My wanderings in the wilderness of song now draw to a close. As I have not altogether satisfied myself with the history which I have given of our lyric verse, or with the characters of our song-writers, I am not vain

enough to believe I shall please others. I have done my best—it has been my wish to speak with freedom, to examine with care and to estimate the merits of each song by the pleasure it gave to others as well as to myself. In accepting the word Song in its extensive and ancient Scottish meaning, I follow not only my own judgment but that of others whose opinions in all matters of taste are worthy of respect. I have not been over studious respecting the arrangement of the songs: the dates of their composition could not always be obtained; yet that seems the most natural order for their publication; and some such plan I would much more willingly follow than the common mode of classing them under their several heads of the pathetic or the humorous. An arrangement so capricious could not well be followed in songs so various as ours, where the tender and satiric, the pathetic and the merry, come often in the course of a couple of verses. In extracting songs from some of our old ballads I have sought to preserve the story and to express it in the language of the age to which it belonged: such has long been the practice in the north with poets as well as singers; and I hope it will be felt that in abating the length of these national rhymes I have not lessened their graphic truth or dramatic vigour. I am less afraid of incurring blame for the pains I have taken in rendering many of our old songs more acceptable to the eye of delicacy than I found them; and in ekeing out fragments and mutilated verses as much as possible in the sense and spirit of the old. They who desire our old verses to remain in dust or impurity will

be displeased perhaps with the freedom of my amendments; and they who seek out with a sensitive delicacy for the Muse's transgressions against strict decorum may think I have sympathised more than I ought with the free language and open mirth of our ancestors. There would be more wisdom in offending than prudence in pleasing such unscrupling or scrupulous persons—the thorn grows on the same branch with the rose; and many over-warm or indecorous expressions are interwoven with

> Measures which the gray-hair'd minstrels sing,
> When they make maidens weep.

In the notes, I have sought to illustrate our lyrics by fragments of neglected or forgotten song, by story, by anecdote, and by criticism. I have gleaned intelligence from some hundreds of volumes, and obtained information from many sources. It would encumber the page, and embarrass the reader, were I to name every work and every source, written or oral, from which my knowledge is drawn. Such idle display of research would not secure me against the charge of inaccuracy by those who choose to prefer it, nor against the imputation of dulness by those (and may they be few!) who find me tedious and uninstructive.

I commenced this desultory Introduction by addressing myself to ONE who has done more for the instruction and delight of mankind than any author since the days of Shakspeare. I imagined him seated beside me, and

listening, with his usual benevolence, to all I had to say on a subject with which he was far better acquainted than myself. If I have omitted all allusion to his presence as I wandered along, it was more from tenderness to him than from any idle vanity of my own. It could not be supposed that all I said would merit the sanction of his judgment or his taste; and had I named his name at every will-o'-wisp turn of the narrative, and at every opinion I expressed, it might have been surmised that I wished to burthen the quick with the dead, like the twin brothers in the pathetic story of Pitscottie. I had no such wish. When the sloe hung its fruit under the leaves of the plum, the sharp flavour betrayed the parentage; and the bloom of the hare-bell was not mistaken for that of the rose, though mingled with it in the garland. I would that the work were more worthy of the subject and of him under whose name I have sought to shelter it;—but I have done my best, and if the half of what I have performed obtains the approbation of my native country, I shall be content.

ALLAN CUNNINGHAM.

London, February, 1825.