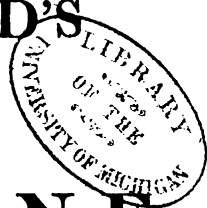
BLACKWOOD'S

Edinburgh

MAGAZINE.



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VOL. II.

OCTOBER, 1817—MARCH, 1818.

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD, EDINBURGH;

AND

JOHN MURRAY, LONDON.

1818.

tal laws of human belief. The accomplishment of these objects was obviously essential to the farther progress of the philosophy of the mind, at the time that Reid began to write; and, if they have been accomplished, as it is professed that they have, in the writings of Reid and Stewart, we have every reason to hope, that when these shall have become more generally and more thoroughly understood, we shall hear little more of "the doubts and difficulties that are still supposed to hang over the questions to which we are now alluding." The truth of the estimate, which Mr Stewart has himself formed of the value of that part of his labour which consists of the correction of the errors of others, will then be felt and acknowledged.

"I would not be understood to magnify, beyond their just value, the inquiries in which we have been now engaged, or those which are immediately to follow. *Their utility is altogether accidental*, arising, not from the positive accession they bring to our stock of scientific truths, but from the pernicious tendency of the doctrines to which they are opposed. On *this* occasion, therefore, I am perfectly willing to acquiesce in the estimate formed by Mr Tucker of the limited importance of metaphysical studies, however much I may be inclined to dispute the universality of its application to all the different branches of the intellectual philosophy. Indeed I shall esteem myself fortunate (considering the magnitude of the errors which I have been attempting to correct) if I shall be found to have merited, in any degree, the praise of that humble usefulness which he has so beautifully described in the following words:

"'The science of abstruse learning, when completely attained, is like Achilles's spear, that healed the wounds it had made before. It casts no additional light on the paths of life, but disperses the clouds with which it had overspread them; it advances not the traveller one step on his journey, but conducts him back again to the spot from whence he had wandered.'"*

I have now considered the only passages, in these two articles of the Review, which seem to have an immediate reference to the "errors mixed up in Mr Stewart's conception of metaphysical philosophy;" and, if the foregoing observations upon them be just, it will appear that this charge is rested, in the former article, on erroneous grounds; in the present article, on inconclusive grounds; and, in the two, on grounds that are inconsistent with each other.

(To be continued.)

VINDICATION OF MR WORDSWORTH'S LETTER TO MR GRAY, ON A NEW EDITION OF BURNS.

MR EDITOR,

I BEG leave to make a few remarks on a Paper which appeared in the Third Number of the Edinburgh Monthly Magazine, respecting Mr Wordsworth's Letter to Mr Gray, on the best mode of composing a memoir of the life of Robert Burns. Had the writer of that Paper confined himself to the question under discussion, I should not have thought it necessary to oppose his opinions, however erroneous they may be; but as he has endeavoured to represent Mr Wordsworth's feelings and motives in an odious and contemptible light, and has shewn greater anxiety to vituperate that truly great Man than to vindicate the character of Burns, I shall, in a few words, expose the weakness and the malignity of this anonymous Calumniator. It is, indeed, of small importance to the interests of Poetry, what such a person may happen to think or say of Mr Wordsworth's *genius*; for it can be with the weakest of the weak alone that the mere unsupported opinion of an unknown scribbler can have any weight: but there is some danger, lest his bold and seemingly sincere asseverations of the unworthiness of Mr Wordsworth's *moral dispositions*, as exhibited in this discussion, may seduce the unwary and unsuspecting mind into the belief that that gentleman has been actuated by paltry feelings, in place of a noble, enthusiastic, and disinterested regard for the cause of Truth. It is but too obvious, that the heart of the "Observer" is full of spite and rancour towards Mr Wordsworth; and, to gratify these pitiful and despicable feelings, he has not scrupled to give a false colouring to the little truth he accidentally may have spoken,—to misrepresent every fact he has touched upon,—and, when such paltry artifices failed, to make assertions which he at the time must have known were gross violations of veracity.

Before venturing to attack the "Letter" itself, the Observer "has

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* Phil. Essays, p. 50.

cleared his way a little" by some preliminary remarks, the minute and captious nature of which, even if they had been true, must have prejudiced every candid mind against him, as they too clearly prove his anxiety to attach blame to Mr Wordsworth, and the miserable satisfaction he enjoys in any imaginary triumph over that distinguished Person. He says,

"In the first place, we conceive that Mr Wordsworth has made a slight mistake, in saying that Gilbert Burns has done him the honour of requesting his advice. This does not appear to have been the case. The request was made by Mr Gray, and not by Mr Burns, who, we have good reason to know, was scarcely aware of Mr Wordsworth's existence, had never read a single line of his Poetry, and had formed no idea good, bad, or indifferent, of his character."

All this is an audacious falsehood. Mr Gilbert Burns requested Mr Gray to learn the sentiments of Mr Wordsworth respecting the subject in question. Mr Gray accordingly wrote to Mr Wordsworth, and the published "Letter" was his valuable reply. It is of no importance whether Mr Gilbert Burns be or be not familiar with Mr Wordsworth's Poetry. A man of his intelligence must know, that Mr Wordsworth is a person of great talents and great virtues, and has long occupied a high station in English literature; and the fact is, that he was not only desirous of knowing the Poet's sentiments, but that, when communicated to him, they were received with pleasure and gratitude.

The Observer then says,

"In the second place, it appears that this 'Letter' was originally a private communication to Mr Gray, and it is a pity that it did not remain so; for we think that there is *great indelicacy, vanity, and presumption*, in thus coming forward with printed and published advice to a man who most assuredly stands in no need of it, but who is infinitely better acquainted with all the bearings of the subject than his officious and egotistical adviser."

Your readers will judge for themselves with regard to Mr Wordsworth's *indelicacy*, from the following sentences in the beginning of his most admirable Letter.

"From the respect which I have long felt for the character of the person who has thus honoured me, and from the gratitude which, as a lover of poetry, I owe to the genius of his departed relative, I should most gladly comply with this wish, if I could hope that any suggestions of mine would be of service to the cause. But really *I feel it is a thing of much delicacy* to give advice upon this occasion, as it appears to me, mainly, not a question of opinion or of taste, but a matter of conscience. Mr Gilbert Burns knows, if any man living does, what his brother was," &c.

It appears, therefore, that Mr Wordsworth was respectfully requested by Mr Gilbert Burns, through the medium of a common friend, to give his opinion on the best mode of conducting the defence of the injured reputation of Robert Burns; and that he complied with that request, by writing a letter, full of sentiments of respect and delicacy towards Mr Gilbert Burns—of love, delight, and admiration, towards his illustrious brother; and for this the Observer accuses him of vanity, indelicacy, and presumption!

The Observer "wishes, in the third place, to ask Mr Wordsworth who advised the publication of his Letter?" To this impertinent question I have to reply (and as all his questions are impertinent, I shall not on that account allow him to escape without an answer), Mr Wordsworth himself, Mr Gray, and every other person whose feelings were interested in the publication. Will the Observer tell what false or injudicious friend advised the publication of his "Observations?" Or was it his own malignity alone?

The Observer says,

"In the fourth place, it is natural to ask, what peculiarly fits Mr Wordsworth to give advice on this subject? He has never lived in Scotland,—he knows nothing about Burns,—he very imperfectly understands the language in which Burns writes,—he has not even read those publications which are supposed to be unjust to his memory," &c.

Here we have assertion without proof, and the crafty confusion of things totally opposite in their nature. Suppose Mr Wordsworth does but imperfectly understand the Scottish dialect, is that to prevent him from forming a just opinion of the moral character of Burns? The opinion he offers is not so much concerning Burns as a Poet, as a Man; and this opinion he might have been qualified to give, had Burns written in a foreign language. But the truth is, that though there may be some peculiar idioms, of which the full beauty or vigour can be felt by a native alone, the general spirit and soul of the Scottish dialect is perfectly understood by Mr Wordsworth.

And here it may be noticed, that the Observer seems to forget that he himself is an Englishman; and therefore, if there be any sense in his objection, that he commits the same error as the Poet, and to a much more offensive extent. Mr Wordsworth, however, has frequently been in Scotland,—has studied, with love and respect, the character of her peasantry,—has conversed repeatedly with persons who knew Burns,—is familiar with all his writings,—and has meditated long and deeply on his most interesting character. It is demanding too much of Mr Wordsworth, that he shall have read all the publications unjust to the memory of Burns; but that he has read the passages which he attacks is certain, for they are quoted in his "Letter."

The Observer says, "in the fifth place, what could have kept Mr Wordsworth silent for twenty years?" Mark this man's gross inconsistency. He first abuses Mr Wordsworth for the indelicacy and presumption of having given an opinion when it was asked, and then abuses him for not having given it when it was not asked. But Mr Wordsworth did not keep silent for twenty years; for in his very earliest production, his "Walks through Swisserland," he quotes Burns' writings, when in England they were comparatively little known. He afterwards addressed a poem to his sons; and in another composition he thus finely denominates Burns,

> "Him who walked in glory and in joy,
> Following his plough upon the mountain-side."

A man would have his hands full of employment, who tried to expose all the errors and absurdities which he saw prevailing in the world; and Mr Wordsworth has done his duty, in coming forward to vindicate the character of a brother Poet, soon as he was furnished with a good opportunity.

I have thus, as concisely as possible, refuted every syllable that the Observer has uttered in his preliminary remarks, and beg leave to call the attention of your readers to the baseness of thus endeavouring, in an underhand way, to prejudice the public mind against a Man, no less admirable for the purity and sanctity of his life, than the originality and splendour of his genius.

The Observer then comes to the Letter itself, and after having read Mr Wordsworth a lecture on candour, delicacy, and impartiality, sets himself forthwith to every kind of misrepresentation, impertinence, and falsehood. He first calls "the advice to Gilbert Burns dull, trite, and absurd," and says, that in Mr Wordsworth's case, "vanity, self-conceit, arrogance, and presumption, finally undermine the intellect, and can reduce a tolerably strong understanding to the very lowest level." This wretched sarcasm shall be rebutted by one quotation from Mr Wordsworth's Letter:

> "The general obligation upon which I have insisted, is especially binding upon those who undertake the biography of *authors*. Assuredly, there is no cause why the lives of that class of men should be pried into with the same diligent curiosity, and laid open with the same disregard of reserve, which may sometimes be expedient in composing the history of men who have borne an active part in the world. Such thorough knowledge of the good and bad qualities of these latter, as can only be obtained by a scrutiny of their private lives, conduces to explain, not only their own public conduct, but that of those with whom they have acted. Nothing of this applies to authors, considered merely as authors. Our business is with their books,—to understand and to enjoy them. And, of poets more especially, it is true—that, if their works be good, they contain within themselves all that is necessary to their being comprehended and relished. It should seem that the ancients thought in this manner; for, of the eminent Greek and Roman poets, few and scanty memorials were, I believe, ever prepared, and fewer still are preserved. It is delightful to read what, in the happy exercise of his own genius, Horace chooses to communicate of himself and his friends; but I confess I am not so much a lover of knowledge, independent of its quality, as to make it likely that it would much rejoice me, were I to hear that records of the Sabine poet and his contemporaries, composed upon the Boswellian plan, had been unearthed among the ruins of Herculaneum. You will interpret what I am writing, *liberally*. With respect to the light which such a discovery might throw upon Roman manners, there would be reasons to desire it; but I should dread to disfigure the beautiful ideal of the memories of those illustrious persons with incongruous features, and to sully the imaginative purity of their classical works with gross and trivial recollections. The least weighty objection to heterogeneous details, is, that they are mainly superfluous, and therefore an incumbrance.
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> But you will perhaps accuse me of refin-

ing too much; and it is, I own, comparatively of little importance, while we are engaged in reading the Iliad, the Eneid, the tragedies of Othello and King Lear, whether the authors of these poems were good or bad men; whether they lived happily or miserably. Should a thought of the kind cross our minds, there would be no doubt, if irresistible external evidence did not decide the question unfavourably, that men of such transcendent genius were both good and happy; and if, unfortunately, it had been on record that they were otherwise, sympathy with the fate of their fictitious personages would banish the unwelcome truth whenever it obtruded itself, so that it would but slightly disturb our pleasure. Far otherwise is it with that class of poets, the principal charm of whose writings depends upon the familiar knowledge which they convey of the personal feelings of their authors. This is eminently the case with the effusions of Burns;—in the small quantity of narrative that he has given, he himself bears no inconsiderable part; and he has produced no drama. Neither the subjects of his poems, nor his manner of handling them, allow us long to forget their author. On the basis of his human character he has reared a poetic one, which, with more or less distinctness, presents itself to view in almost every part of his earlier, and, in my estimation, his most valuable verses. This poetic fabric, dug out of the quarry of genuine humanity, is airy and spiritual;—and though the materials, in some parts, are coarse, and the disposition is often fantastic and irregular, yet the whole is agreeable and strikingly attractive. Plague, then, upon your remorseless hunters after matter of fact (who, after all, rank among the blindest of human beings) when they would convince you that the foundations of this admirable edifice are hollow, and that its frame is unsound! Granting that all which has been raked up to the prejudice of Burns were literally true; and that it added, which it does not, to our better understanding of human nature and human life (for that genius is not incompatible with vice, and that vice leads to misery—the more acute from the sensibilities, which are the elements of genius—we needed not those communications to inform us), how poor would have been the compensation for the deduction made, by this extrinsic knowledge, from the intrinsic efficacy of his poetry—to please and to instruct!"

There is a strain of philosophical thought and philosophical feeling in this fine passage, utterly above the comprehension and the sympathy of the Observer; and, I am sure that all your readers, whatever may be their opinions of Mr Wordsworth's poetry, will peruse such sentiments with a true admiration of the soul from which they flowed, and a full conviction that such a man can utter nothing derogatory to Burns, or unworthy of his own dignified character.

The second charge brought against Mr Wordsworth is, that after holding the opinion "that Burns was not addicted to dissipation,—that he was a most exemplary family-man,—and that all stories to the contrary are exaggerations, fabrications, and falsehoods," he has elsewhere maintained an opinion diametrically opposite, "and expressed, in miserable doggerel, what Dr Currie has said in elegant prose."

Mr Wordsworth, throughout his whole Letter, so far from maintaining any such opinion as is here falsely attributed to him, laments, with a lofty and compassionate forgiveness, the errors and failings of the great Scottish Poet. That Burns was occasionally betrayed by the vehemence of his passions—by the burning energy of his character—into reprehensible conduct, is admitted and bewailed; but it is the bitterness of tone with which his Biographers and Critics have spoken of his frailties,—and the cruel, unnatural, unphilosophical, inhuman, and unchristian exposure of all his most secret thoughts, feelings, and actions, that Mr Wordsworth reprobates with a noble flow of impassioned eloquence,—an exposure to which it would not be fitting that the purest and most spotless of human Beings should ever be subjected. The "Poem addressed to the Sons of Burns," which the Observer calls "miserable doggrel," has, I know, appeared in a very different light to some of the best Poets of this age. The Observer needs to be informed, that it was not Mr Wordsworth's business, on such an occasion, to indulge in high poetical reveries; but that, impressed with a mournful recollection of the evils and sorrows to which a highly-gifted Being had through life been exposed by the impetuosity of his passions, and even by some of the most admirable qualities of his fervid mind, a good and a wise man had only to address himself with solemn earnestness and affectionate forewarning to the youthful sons of the mighty dead, and to point to his grave, as at once breathing the most awful dissuasion from vice, and the noblest encouragement to virtue.

The third charge which the Ob-

severer brings against Mr Wordsworth is, that he "has made a most *furious* and most *unfair* attack upon Dr Currie's Life of Burns." Here, again, I shall let Mr Wordsworth speak for himself.

"I well remember the acute sorrow with which, by my own fire-side, I first perused Dr Currie's Narrative, and some of the Letters, particularly of those composed in the latter part of the poet's life. If my pity for Burns was extreme, this pity did not preclude a strong indignation, of which he was not the object. If, said I, it were in the power of a biographer to relate the truth, the *whole* truth, and nothing *but* the truth, the friends and surviving kindred of the deceased, for the sake of general benefit to mankind, might endure that such heart-rending communication should be made to the world. But in no case is this possible; and, in the present, the opportunities of directly acquiring other than superficial knowledge have been most scanty; for the writer has barely seen the person who is the subject of his tale; nor did his avocations allow him to take the pains necessary for ascertaining what portion of the information conveyed to him was authentic. So much for facts and actions; and to what purpose relate them even were they true, if the narrative cannot be heard without extreme pain; unless they are placed in such a light, and brought forward in such order, that they shall explain their own laws, and leave the reader in as little uncertainty as the mysteries of our nature will allow, respecting the spirit from which they derived their existence, and which governed the agent? But hear, on this pathetic and awful subject, the poet himself, pleading for those who have transgressed!

'One point must still be greatly dark,
The moving *why* they do it;
And just as lamely can ye mark
How far, perhaps, they rue it.

Who made the heart, 'tis *he* alone
Decidedly can try us;
He knows each chord—its various tone,
Each spring, its various bias.

Then at the balance let's be mute,
We never can adjust it;
What's done we partly may compute,
But know not what's *resisted*.'

How happened it that the recollection of this affecting passage did not check *so amiable a man as Dr Currie*, while he was revealing to the world the infirmities of its author?"

Your readers will judge whether there be any thing *furious or unfair* in this passage, which is the strongest against Dr Currie in the whole Letter. I for myself have no scruple in saying, that my opinion does not exactly coincide with that of Mr Wordsworth, on the merits of Dr Currie's Edition of Burns. I am strongly inclined to think, that from the Letters of Burns, &c. all arranged chronologically, as they are in that Edition, a candid and thoughtful reader may perceive the steps by which Burns was led to form habits of life not altogether defensible, and may trace his sorrows, anxieties, trials, temptations, and resistance, as far as it is possible for one man to judge of the feelings and conduct of another. But, though in this one point I differ from Mr Wordsworth, I perfectly agree with him in thinking, and I feel confident that every reflecting mind will be of the same opinion, *first*, That Dr Currie, incautiously and rashly, applied expressions to the moral conduct of Burns, which are altogether unjustified by any thing contained in his Letters or his History;* and, *secondly*, That much more has been laid open to the Public concerning the Private Life of Burns, than was consistent either with the justice due to the dead, or the delicacy due to the living. It is upon this ground that Mr Wordsworth stands triumphant; and I conceive he has done an important service to Literature, by his eloquent and original exposition of the Philosophy of Biography.

It ought to be borne in mind, that it is not Dr Currie alone who has spoken injuriously of Burns' character. A whole host of paltry scribblers have trampled irreverently over his ashes, and by a culpable expression of that excellent man, sought to justify their own malignant aspersions. It is on this account that Mr Wordsworth has thought it his duty to reprehend Dr Currie's errors; which he has done with great tenderness and moderation. It is perfectly true (as Mr Wordsworth remarks), that *the difference of their social conditions* caused Dr Currie, unknown to himself, to speak of Burns with an indelicate freedom, and an air of superiority. He felt that Burns was a *Poet*, but he also knew that he had been a *ploughman*. Had he been on the same level with himself *in rank*, and had his surviving relations been *gentlefolks*, he would never have dared to enter into so detailed an exposition of his habits and qualities, nor indeed

* The assertion, for example, that during the latter part of his life, Burns was perpetually "*under the influence of alcohol*,"—a most pedantic mode of uttering an untruth.

would such an idea have entered into his mind. Without doubt, most of the foolish and unmeaning anecdotes of Burns, on which the charge of immorality or dissipation is founded, are either the fictions or the gross exaggerations of vulgar minds, eager to claim an acquaintance with the wonderful Man, or, what is worse, they are the revealed secrets of those unguarded hours, from which, who shall dare to say that he has always been free, and which, nearly harmless in themselves, become objects of blame, only when bruited abroad with all the vile accompaniments of misrepresentation, detraction, and scandal. But as it is the doom of genius to be exposed to such evils, so also is it the power and privilege of genius, finally to triumph over them with a perfect triumph.

The Observer's fourth charge against Mr Wordsworth is, that he has penned "a Philippic against the Edinburgh Review;" and this Philippic is said to be "so low and vulgar," that it must not be permitted to sully the immaculate pages of the Edinburgh Monthly Magazine. The Observer's tender and trembling sensibility is quite shocked with Mr Wordsworth's rudeness and want of punctilio towards Mr Jeffrey. He tries to sooth that ingenious gentleman's supposed irritation by the most fulsome and extravagant flattery; and informs the world, that, "as an intellectual being, he is in all respects immeasurably superior to Mr Wordsworth." The world have ample opportunities of forming their judgment of this matter, and probably the Observer's mere assertion will have small weight on the decision. But he is wofully ignorant of the character of these gentlemen, if he imagines that any thing he can say will elevate the one or depress the other, or that his observations can meet with any other feeling than the contempt of both. Mr Jeffrey has long been, in Criticism and Poetry, the antagonist of Mr Wordsworth; he has, in the opinion of that gentleman, treated his productions uncandidly, unfairly, and ignorantly; and, accordingly, Mr Wordsworth, both in his Letter, and in the notes to the collected Edition of his Works, has told him, in plain terms, that he despises him as a Critic, and all his Criticism. The Poet will have his adherents, and the Critic will have his—but all men who respect boldness, independence, and the freedom of conscious power, will, whatever be their opinion on the merits of the controversy, admire and applaud the fearless defiance thus thrown out to the adversary, and contrast it with the sneaking baseness of this anonymous calumniator, who, with a peculiar refinement of cowardice, seems equally afraid to acknowledge the praises he heaps on his friend, and the abuses he scatters upon his enemy.

But, in the fifth place, the Observer goes a step farther, and declares his belief that Mr Wordsworth is wholly indifferent to the character of Burns, and that he has written the whole of his long Letter to Mr Gray out of pure spite to Mr Jeffrey! I shall not insult your readers by exposing the folly of this malignant insinuation; but as I fear I have already exceeded my limits, I must beg leave to say a very few words respecting those passages in the Edinburgh Review, which has called forth Mr Wordsworth's just reprehension.

The Observer has quoted a pretty long passage from the Edinburgh Review, to show that Mr Wordsworth had unjustly accused Mr Jeffrey of depreciating Burns; but, with his usual stupidity or duplicity, he talks of the Reviewer's opinion of Burns' *genius*, as if it were of his *moral character*. But about the genius of Burns there is no controversy. The passages of which Mr Wordsworth speaks indignantly are the following:

"*The leading vice of Burns' character, and the cardinal deformity of all his productions, was his contempt, or affectation of contempt, for prudence, decency, and regularity, and his admiration of thoughtlessness, oddity, and vehement sensibility; his belief, in short, in the dispensing power of genius and social feeling in all matters of morality and common sense;*" adding, that these vices and erroneous notions "*have communicated to a great part of his productions a character of immorality at once contemptible and hateful.*"

Now, every impartial person must allow that this charge against Burns is so general, sweeping, and comprehensive, as to be most untrue and most unjust. Burns, it is true, in many of his letters, which for the most part seem to me very unnatural, inflated, and bombastical, though often beautified by touches of spirit, nature, and pathos, indulged himself in a sort of rant about independence and so forth, till

it became a habit, and a very offensive one; but this bad taste is rarely to be found in his Poetry, and generally speaking, it occurs in those letters addressed to persons who, from their ignorance and low feelings, were likely to enjoy such rhodomontade, and to encourage it. When he writes with all his heart and all his soul, and obeys the impulses of his own noble nature, the strain of his moral feelings is simple, pure,—even sublime. And when it is considered how great a proportion of his Poetry is of this character,—how beautifully he has painted the manners, feelings, and domestic enjoyments of the Peasantry of Scotland,—with what an affectionate enthusiasm the name of Burns is uttered daily and hourly throughout the cottages of a thousand valleys,—it may well excite a stronger feeling than surprise, to hear a man of talents and virtues like Mr Jeffrey assert, "that a great part of his productions have a character of immorality at once contemptible and hateful."

But even allowing for a moment that these faults attach to the writings of Burns to a far greater extent than I believe they do, it was most rash and unadvised to say that the leading vice of Burns' character was a contempt for prudence, decency, and regularity. At all events, so grievous a charge ought to have been accompanied with a free and joyful admission of his many great virtues. This does not appear to have been the case; and though, therefore, the article in question contains much good criticism both on the Letters and the Poetry of Burns, I think that Mr Jeffrey has been so unrestrained in the expressions of his dislike and aversion to what may have been reprehensible, and so chary of his admiration and delight in all that was noble in the character of that illustrious man, as to have rendered his account of him not only imperfect and unsatisfactory, but erroneous and unjust.

Of Burns' character as a man, it yet remains for some mind of power to speak as it ought to be spoken of. To me it seems that he was a sublime Being. While yet a Boy,—before his very sinews were knit, we behold in him the prop and the pillar of his Father's house. We see him not walking only on the mountain-tops, breathing in the inspiration of nature, as other great Poets have by the benign indulgence of Providence been allowed in their youth to walk,—but we see him laden with incessant toil,—I might almost say, working the work of a slave. He arose with the lark, but it was not to the life of the lark, a day of song and of rapture in the happy brightness of the sky. Severe and painful duties assailed him and enveloped him: the fields and the hills were first known to his soul as the scenes of bodily labour and endurance, and the very clouds of heaven agitated him with the hopes and fears connected even with the bare means of existence. But "chill Penury represt not his noble rage,"—Freedom sprung out of slavery,—Glory out of gloom,—Light out of darkness. Like an Alpine flower, he grew in beauty and in grace, amid the hail, the snow, and the tempest. Like a storm-loving bird, he "beat up against the wind." As Wordsworth himself says finely of young Clifford, there was

"Among the shepherd grooms no mate
For him, a child of strength and state."

When the day closed in upon him, "and the weary cotter to his cottage went," he sat not down in dim despondency by the smoke of his lowly hearth. He sat there like a Spirit or a God—in a sublime contentment inspired by the inward power of genius and of virtue. His Father's gray hairs blessed him; and now that human duties were nobly performed, came the hour of his triumph. His Country's genius appeared before him, and bound the holly round his head,—not the Phantom of a mere heated Fancy, but the living Genius who had watched over him from his cradle, who loved her mountains and her valleys more dearly for his sake, and from whose kindled eyes there shot into his heart the assurance of immortal fame.

There is no need to shrink from the contemplation of his manhood, or of his death. He did not *talk* only of independence—if ever man did, he *practised it*. We hear of the munificence of the rich, and we praise them: but what is it to the life-giving generosity of Robert Burns? It fell like dew from heaven upon the hoary temples of his Parents—he was a noble Friend to a noble Brother—and though neglected by the Great, whose mean existence he has immortalized, there is, to my mind, something delightful in that very neglect, for it leaves Burns unpatronized and unpensioned,—his body

possessed in equal freedom with his soul, and standing aloof from the worldlings, none daring to impeach his integrity, nor to tear one leaf from that oaken branch which Independence bound round his forehead, among the immortal laurels of Genius.

Burns is in his grave,—but let no good man ever behold that splendid monument which now rightly covers his ashes, without feeling, in a profound trance of love, pity, and veneration, that his errors and his frailties were but as passing clouds that sometimes marred the beauty of his radiant soul,—that all the primal duties of human life were gloriously performed "by the poor inhabitant below,"—and that if the Ghosts of the dead were permitted to join in the affectionate devotion of the living, that the Father of Burns would, with his aged Mother, and his Widow, and his Sons, and his Brother, kneel beside his grave, and bathe it with the tears of love, gratitude, and nature.

Such are some of the feelings which rise up in my mind when I think of that great Man; and if there be any truth in them, it is not to be wondered at that Mr Wordsworth, himself a Poet, should be indignant with any person who has spoken slightingly or severely of such a Being. At the same time, Mr Wordsworth is more indignant with, and less inclined to make allowance for Mr Jeffrey than I am, and than what seems to me reasonable. I conceive that Mr Jeffrey, having in his recollection some of those offences of Burns against good taste and feeling before alluded to, wrote of them with the severity they deserved, but that, in the warmth and zeal of composition, he came to view them as of more frequent occurrence than they really are, and thus to consider as a cardinal vice of Burns' character what was only an acquired habit. I see no reason to believe that he was actuated by any other motive than a regard for morality and virtue; nor is it credible, on any supposition, that he strove purposely to depreciate the character of Burns. All his critical writings are distinguished by a pure and high moral feeling; and it is to be regretted that in this case he has looked only at the darker side of the picture, and blamed too severely what was reprehensible, without at all eulogising what was truly sublime. But though Mr Jeffrey may in this way be excused, no excuse should be offered for the criticism itself; and I willingly deliver up the offensive passages to the full tempest of Mr Wordsworth's indignation.

In addressing to you these remarks, I have no other object than the defence of truth; and I therefore must say, that while I sympathize with all the noble and exalted sentiments contained in Mr Wordsworth's Letter, as they respect Burns and the Biography of Poets and literary Men, I cannot by any means admire his efforts at wit and sarcasm, which seem to me very clumsy and ineffectual; and when he calls Mr Jeffrey "an infatuated slanderer," he certainly transgresses the limits of a righteous anger, and affords some shadow of pretence to such poor creatures as the Observer, when they accuse him of undue irritation towards that gentleman.

There is here no call upon me to deviate into any discussion on the merits or demerits of Mr Jeffrey as a Critic. He probably would care as little for my opinion as I do for his; yet it is right that all liberal-minded men should, to a certain degree, respect each other's opinions. I therefore declare it to be my conviction, in direct opposition to that of Mr Wordsworth, that Mr Jeffrey is the best Professional Critic* we now have, and that, so far from shewing gross incapacity when writing of works of original genius, that he has never, in one instance, withheld the praise of originality when it was due. Of Mr Wordsworth himself he has uniformly written in terms of far loftier commendation than any other contemporary Critic, and has placed him at all times in the first rank of Genius. It is true that he has committed innumerable mistakes, and occasionally exhibited a very perplexing ignorance, both when discussing the general question of Poetry in reference to Mr Wordsworth's system, and when analysing individual poems and passages; but of many of the most striking and most admirable qualities of Mr Wordsworth's poetical character, he has shewn an acute and fine discernment, and poured himself out in praise of them

* Our readers will find, in an early Number, the character of this celebrated Person discussed by Schlegel. His Essay on the Periodical Criticism of England has been translated for us by one well qualified for the task. EDITOR.

with the most unrestrained and glowing enthusiasm. Those unmeaning sarcasms, fitting the lively and ingenious turn of his mind, accustomed in his profession to a mode of thinking and feeling not very congenial with the simple and stately emotions of Poetry, can have no influence upon spirits capable and worthy of enjoying such Poems as the Lyrical Ballads, and such a Poem as the Excursion,—while they may afford a suitable amusement to those pert and presuming persons, or those dull and obtuse ones, with whom genius holds no alliance, and to whom she can speak no intelligible language; but it is surely pleasanter to see such small folk contentedly swallowing the dole dealt out to them, in a moment of sprightliness, by a facetious Critic, than to see them laying their unprivileged hands on the viands of that Table which Wordsworth has spread for the rich and wealthy men in the Land of Intellect.

It should, however, be held in mind by Mr Wordsworth's admirers, among whom are to be found every living Poet of any eminence, that, with all the fearlessness of original genius, he has burst and cast away the bonds which were worn very contentedly by many great writers. Mr Wordsworth is a man of too much original power not to have very often written ill; and it is incredible that, 'mid all his gigantic efforts to establish a system (even allowing that system to be a right one), he has never violated the principles of taste or reason. He has brought about a *revolution* in Poetry; and a revolution can no more be brought about in Poetry than in the Constitution, without the destruction or injury of many excellent and time-hallowed establishments. I have no doubt that, when all the rubbish is removed, and free and open space given to behold the structures which Mr Wordsworth has reared in all the grandeur of their proportions, that Posterity will hail him as a regenerator and a creator. But meanwhile some allowance must be made for them who, however ignorantly, adhere to their ancient idols; and for my own part, I can bear all manner of silly nonsense to be spoken about Wordsworth with the most unmoved tranquillity. I know that if he has often written ill, Milton and Shakspeare have done so before him. Johnson has said, that we cannot read many pages of Shakspeare "without contempt and indignation;" and Hume says, that the same divine Poet cannot, for two pages together, "preserve a reasonable propriety." The same critic says, that at least a third of Paradise Lost is "almost wholly devoid of harmony and elegance—nay, of all vigour of imagination." Now, neither Samuel Johnson nor David Hume were dunces. Let us therefore believe that neither is Mr Francis Jeffrey a dunce,—and let Mr Wordsworth be contented with sharing the fate of Milton and Shakspeare.

But in a subject of this nature, why should we dwell on any disagreeable or painful altercations between men of Power. Here there is a noble prospect, without any drawback or alloy, to delight our souls and our imagination. A Poet distinguished for the originality of his genius,—for his profound knowledge of the human heart,—for his spiritual insight into all the grandeur and magnificence of the external world,—for a strain of the most serene, undisturbed, and lofty morality, within whose control no mind can come without being elevated, purified, and enlightened,—for a religion partaking at once of all the solemnity of faith, and all the enthusiasm of poetry,—and, to crown all with a perfect consummation, a Poet who has realized, in a life of sublime solitude, the visions that have blessed the dreams of his inspiration,—He comes forward with a countenance and a voice worthy of himself and the Being of whom he speaks,—and vindicates, from the confused admiration, or the vulgar reproaches of ordinary minds, a Bard who is the pride of his native land, and a glory to human nature,—while he speaks of his failings with such reverential pity—of his virtues with such noble praise, that we see Burns standing before us in all his weakness and all his strength,—the same warm-hearted, affectionate, headstrong, fervid, impassioned, imprudent, erring, independent, noble, high-minded, and inspired Man, that won or commanded every soul, and whose voice, omnipotent in life, speaks with a yet more overpowering sound from the silence of the grave.

N.

"The world was all forgot—the struggle o'er—
Desperate the joy.—That day they read no more."

Mr Hunt has indeed taken mighty pains to render Rimini a story not of incest, but of love. The original betrothing of Francesca to Paolo he has changed into her being espoused by him as the proxy of his brother. The harshness and ferocity of Lanciotto's character, and the hideous deformity of his person, have both been removed, as if the poet were anxious to render it impossible for us to have the least sympathy, or compassion, or pardon, for the frailty of his heroine. In the true story of Rimini, both Paolo and Francesca were sacrificed by the murderous hand of the detecting and cruel Lanciotto. But here the dagger and the axe are laid aside, and we have, in their room, the point of honour and the thrusting of rapiers. Paolo dies not by the secret revenge of his brother, but by rushing voluntarily on the sword, wielded fairly against him; and the poet is at the pains to borrow a beautiful eulogy from Ellis's Specimens, which he makes the survivor utter over the body of the slain. The personages are all amiable, the sins all voluntary, and the sufferings sentimental. Many a one reads Rimini as a pleasant romance, and closes it without having the least suspicion that he has been perusing a tale pregnant with all the horrors of most unpardonable guilt. John Ford is the only English poet who has treated of incest with the same openness and detail as Leigh Hunt, but how infinitely above that gentleman's reach are his ideas of its punishment.

There is a place
(List, daughter) in a black and hollow vault,
Where day is never seen; there shines no sun,
But flaming horror of consuming fires;
A lightless sulphur, chok'd with smoky fogs
Of an infected darkness; in this place
Dwell many thousand thousand sundry sorts
Of never-dying deaths; there is burning oil
Pour'd down the drunkard's throat; the usurer
Is forced to sup whole draughts of molten gold;
There is the murderer for ever stabb'd,
Yet can he never die; there lies the wanton
On racks of burning steel, whilst in his soul
He feels the torment of his raging lust.
[Mercy! oh, mercy!]
There stand those wretched things,
Who have dreamed out whole years in lawless sheets
And secret incests, cursing one another;
Then you will wish each kiss your brother gave
Had been a dagger's point; then you shall hear
How he will cry, 'Oh, would my wicked sister
Had first been damn'd when she did yield to lust.'*

The story of Rimini can indeed do no harm to any noble spirit. We never yet saw a lady lift it up, who did not immediately throw it down again in disgust. But the lofty spirits of the earth are not the only ones; and we confess, that we think that poet deserving of chastisement, who prostitutes his talents in a manner that is likely to corrupt milliners and apprentice-boys, no less than him who flies at noble game, and spreads his corruption among princes. Z.

* "'Tis pity she's a whore." Act iii. S. 6.

LETTER OCCASIONED BY N'S VINDICATION OF MR WORDSWORTH IN LAST NUMBER.

MR EDITOR,

In common with most of your readers, I read with considerable pleasure the greater part of a paper in your last Number, entitled, "Vindication of Mr Wordsworth's Letter to Mr Gray." The writer of that paper (who chooses to lie concealed under the signature of N.) has displayed much kindliness of disposition, both in regard to the memory of Burns and the living name of Mr Wordsworth; and he has expressed the opinions which he holds with a natural and flowing eloquence, which has not, I think, been often surpassed by any modern authors of our country. But I hope I may be permitted to say without offence, in the pages of your Magazine, that, so far as Mr Wordsworth is concerned, all the kindness of feeling, and all the very masterly rhetoric of N. have, on the present occasion, been most egregiously misapplied. On looking back to the Third Number of Blackwood's Magazine, I own I was astonished to find, that although N. has written seven pages, under the name of "A Vindication of Mr Wordsworth," he has nevertheless, by some strange oversight (whether intentional or otherwise it is not for me to determine), left the character of that gentleman

exactly as it stood before he took his pen in his hand, and offered not a single word which can have the effect of sheltering him from those accusations of egotism, spleen, and scurrility, which had originally been brought against him, with apparently so much reason, by your English correspondent the "Observer."

It is very far from being my intention to go at any length into the merits of the original controversy about the proposed Memoir of Robert Burns. That great man, I am very proud to tell you, was an intimate friend of mine; and no one who knows me will suspect that my silence on that subject arises from any indifference to the memory of the departed poet. At present my business is not with Burns, but with Wordsworth, who has, as I and not a few of Burns' friends in this neighbourhood conceive, thrust himself into an affair of which he knows nothing, and with regard to which he has offered, and indeed can offer, no advice which is worthy of the smallest attention, either from Mr Gilbert Burns or any other sensible man. Indeed, were I to fix upon what sort of person I should fancy the least likely to give good counsel to a biographer of Burns, I have little hesitation in saying, that I should select just such a one as Mr Wordsworth,—a man who, if it be true that he possesses poetical genius, most certainly possesses no other quality in common with Robert Burns;—a retired, pensive, egotistical *collector of stamps;* one who has no notion of that merry, hearty life, that Burns delighted in; and one that seems to be completely overflowing with envy, malignity, and a thousand bad passions, of which Burns' nobler nature, whatever defects it might otherwise have, was at all times entirely incapable. How can a melancholy, sighing, half-parson sort of gentleman, who lives in a small circle of old maids and sonnetteers, and drinks tea now and then with the solemn Laureate, have any sympathy with the free and jolly dispositions of one who spent his evenings in drinking whisky punch at mason lodges with Matthew Henderson and David Lapraik? To my view it would be scarcely less absurd in Gilbert Burns to send Mr Wordsworth a long letter concerning the proper method of drawing *the Recluse* to a conclusion, than it was in Mr Wordsworth to prescribe rules to Gilbert with regard to that Memoir of his illustrious brother, which he is so well qualified in every way to make exactly what it should be, without the officious hints of any Laker in existence.

In the Edinburgh Review upon Burns, there occur several expressions which can never cease to appear both offensive and unjustifiable to every one who knew Burns' character, not from his letters, wherein he was originally too ill educated a man to be ever perfectly at his ease, but from his conversation, which all who have ever sat in company with him must allow to have been throughout, in the highest degree, manly, feeling, and amiable. But I must confess, that whatever faults may be found in the account of the Edinburgh Review, exist, to my apprehension at least, in a degree far more atrocious in that of the Quarterly. To quote either of them would be distressing to my own feelings, and I have little doubt that no extract I could make would appear either new or pleasing to the majority of your readers. But supposing, for a moment, that Mr Wordsworth is sincere in the opinion he expresses, how comes it that he, in a professed and formal defence of Robert Burns, takes no notice whatever of the abuse thrown out against the character of that poet in the Quarterly, and yet spends no less than eight pages of his Letter in railing at the Edinburgh, for its far less blamable paragraphs on the same topic? But I cannot resist giving your readers a small specimen of this very interesting part of the production.

"When a man, self-elected into the office of a public judge of the literature and life of his contemporaries, can have the audacity to go these lengths in framing a summary of the contents of volumes that are scattered over every quarter of the globe, and extant in almost every cottage of Scotland, to give the lie to his labours; we must not wonder if, in the plenitude of his concern for the interests of abstract morality, the infatuated slanderer should have found no obstacle to prevent him from insinuating that the poet, whose writings are to this degree stained and disfigured, was 'one of the sons of fancy and of song, who spend, in vain superfluities, the money that belongs of right to the pale industrious tradesmen and his famishing infants; and who rave about friendship and philosophy in a tavern, while their wives' hearts,' &c. &c.

"It is notorious, that this persevering

Aristarch,* as often as a work of original genius comes before him, avails himself of that opportunity to re-proclaim to the world the narrow range of his own comprehension. The happy self-complacency, the unsuspecting vain-glory, and the cordial *bonhommie*, with which this part of his duty is performed, do not leave him free to complain of being hardly dealt with if any one should declare the truth, by pronouncing much of the foregoing attack upon the intellectual and moral character of Burns, to be the trespass (for reasons that will shortly appear, it cannot be called the venial trespass) of a mind obtuse, superficial, and inept. What portion of malignity such a mind is susceptible of, the judicious admirers of the poet, and the discerning friends of the man, will not trouble themselves to inquire; but they will wish that this evil principle had possessed more sway than they are at liberty to assign to it; the offender's condition would not then have been so hopeless. For malignity *selects* its diet; but where is to be found the nourishment from which vanity will revolt! Malignity may be appeased by triumphs real or supposed, and will then sleep, or yield its place to a repentance producing dispositions of good will, and desires to make amends for past injury; but vanity is restless, reckless, intractable, unappeasable, insatiable. Fortunate is it for the world when this spirit incites only to actions that meet with an adequate punishment in derision; such, as in a scheme of poetical justice, would be aptly requited by assigning to the agents, when they quit this lower world, a station in that not uncomfortable limbo—the Paradise of Fools! But, assuredly, we shall have here another proof that ridicule is not the test of truth, if it prevent us from perceiving, that *depravity* has no ally more active, more inveterate, nor, from the difficulty of divining to what kind and degree of extravagance it may prompt, more pernicious than self-conceit. Where this alliance is too obvious to be disputed, the culprit ought not to be allowed the benefit of contempt—as a shelter from detestation; much less should he be permitted to plead, in excuse for his transgressions, that special malevolence had little or no part in them. It is not recorded, that the ancient, who set fire to the temple of Diana, had a particular dislike to the goddess of chastity, or held idolatry in abhorrence; he was a fool, an egregious fool, but not the less, on that account, a most odious monster. The tyrant, who is described as having rattled his chariot along a bridge of brass over the heads of his subjects, was, no doubt, inwardly laughed at; but what if this mock Jupiter, not satisfied with an empty noise of his own making, had amused himself throwing fire-brands upon the house-tops, as a substitute for lightning; and, from his elevation, had hurled stones upon the heads of his people, to shew that he was a master of the destructive bolt, as well as of the harmless voice of the thunder!—The lovers of all that is honourable to humanity have recently had occasion to rejoice over the downfall of an intoxicated despot, whose vagaries furnish more solid materials by which the philosopher will exemplify how strict is the connection between the ludicrously, and the terribly fantastic. We know, also, that Robespierre was one of the vainest men that the most vain country upon earth has produced;—and from this passion, and from that cowardice which naturally connects itself with it, flowed the horrors of his administration. It is a descent, which I fear you will scarcely pardon, to compare these redoubtable enemies of mankind with the anonymous conductor of a perishable publication. But the moving spirit is the same in them all; and, as far as difference of circumstances and disparity of powers will allow, manifests itself in the same way, by professions of reverence for truth, and concern for duty—carried to the giddiest heights of ostentation, while practice seems to have no other reliance than on the omnipotence of falsehood."

* "A friend, who chances to be present while the author is correcting the proof sheets, observes that Aristarchus is libelled by this application of his name, and advises that 'Zoilus' should be substituted. The question lies between spite and presumption; and it is not easy to decide upon a case where the claims of each party are so strong: but the name of Aristarch, who, simple man! would allow no verse to pass for Homer's which he did not approve of, is retained, for reasons that will be deemed cogent."

Who does not see, in all this effervescence of impotent wrath, the true purpose of Mr Wordsworth's Letter? Who, that contrasts the tameness and insipidity of the rest of it with the pestiferous zeal of this extract, does not at once perceive that the true objects of the author's concern were not Robert Burns and Dr Currie, but himself and Mr Jeffray, and those reviews of the *Lyrical Ballads*, the *Excursion*, and the *White Doe*, which he so credibly informs us he has never read? That Mr Wordsworth should have been extremely nettled by the sarcasms of the Edinburgh Review, seems to be abundantly natural; but that he, if he be a man of genius, should at all times and on every occasion stand howling on the highway, and entreating all mankind to look at his blisters—appears, to say the least of it, extremely injudicious. Cannot Mr Wordsworth content himself with sitting at home and carping at

Mr Jeffray, in the midst of his own little knot of kindred worshippers at Keswick, where, I suppose, as Crabbe says,

"Most overbearing in his proud discourse,
And overwhelming of his voice the force,
And overpowering is he when he shows
What floats upon a mind that always overflows."

If Mr Wordsworth really be a great man, he will tell us so much more convincingly by some great and dignified work of genius, than by little venomous pamphlets addressed to Mr James Gray of the High School of Edinburgh. If Mr W. does not take in the Edinburgh Review, what do we care for that? Does he suppose we are to break our sets merely to please him? If Mr Jeffray's criticisms be of no value, let him say nothing about them or their author; if they be erroneous, let him get his friend N., or the Laureate, or any other of "*the rich and wealthy men in the land of intellect,*" to answer them in the Quarterly. But if he expects by open and unsupported Billingsgate, either to raise himself, or depress his adversary in our estimation, let him rest assured that he is wofully mistaken. He has conducted himself, on this occasion, (and I will defy your correspondent, with all his eloquence, to prove the reverse,) like a sneaking pettifogger, who, being employed to defend a poor man from the tyranny of two neighbouring justices, should choose, in the course of the law-suit, to keep steadily in remembrance the fact, that he himself had been condemned for poaching by one of these gentlemen, and connived at by the other, and should therefore carry on his client's war tooth and nail against the former, but wink hard upon any overbearing measures which must please the fancy of the latter. The wit of the Edinburgh Reviewer has, I imagine, left such a scar in the liver of the Laker, that the discharge of bile and *sanies* is not chronic but continuous, and that for him to publish any thing, poem or pamphlet, without a seasoning of abuse against Mr Jeffray, is just as impossible as it would have been for our poor friend, Robert Burns, in an evening of jollity, to see old Mause's gill-stoup pass him without putting it to his lips.

So much for Mr Wordsworth's letter; but I cannot conclude without mentioning, *en passant*, to Mr N., that throughout the whole of his diverting paper, there prevails an expression of veneration for the literary character of the author of that production, with which he will, on this side the Tweed, find very few to sympathize. Whatever may be the opinion of the "rich and wealthy men in the land of intellect," with respect to the "viands of that table which Wordsworth has spread for them," they may rest satisfied that the world at large is content with plainer fare, and that very few envy them the princely hospitalities of which it is their aristocratic privilege to partake. I myself was yesterday in company with some very well informed people, who, after hearing me read out N's letter, exclaimed, as if with one consent, "Who the d—— is this William Wordsworth?" For myself, I will frankly confess that my knowledge of his writings has been derived chiefly from the extracts in the Edinburgh Review. But as that Review has been giving articles about him every now and then for these fifteen years past, and as many hundreds of his lines have been quoted by it, I do not observe why I should suppose the impressions under which I lie to have been rashly assumed. On perusing your last Number, however, in many parts of which Mr Wordsworth's name is introduced with great appearance of respect, my curiosity with regard to that gentleman was so much excited, that I wrote to the library at Glasgow for a sight of his poems. They have accordingly sent me their copy of the Excursion, which I perceive is as yet uncut, with permission to keep it for a twelvemonth if I think proper. But to what extent I shall avail myself of their kind liberality I am quite uncertain. I have the honour to be, Mr Editor, your obedient servant, D.

Dumfries, Nov. 10*th*, 1817.

VERSES OCCASIONED BY A LATE CONTROVERSY RESPECTING ROBERT BURNS.

MR EDITOR,

I HAVE just now read, with a great deal of pleasure, the Observations on Mr Wordsworth's Letter, contained in the Third Number of the Monthly

turtle and venison, punch and champaigne, let him adhere invariably to bread and water. On these principles, as I am by *nature* the most indolent of all beings, and could luxuriate in absolute *quietism* from one year's end to the other, I resolved to become a "Jumper." The method of practice I proposed to myself was, to jump violently two or three dozen times in succession, (accompanying this exercise with loud and deep intonations of voice) then to stop, take out pen, ink, and paper, and write down a couplet or stanza. In this way I have already finished a poetical romance in ten books, besides minor pieces without number. At first, I practised in my own library; but the neighbours began to complain of violent and most unaccountable noises; besides, I broke several chairs and a table, and bruised myself very much by some severe falls. I then tried to study in the garden which is behind the house in which I reside. But a party of ladies in a neighbouring balcony interrupted my progress, at first by sounds of merriment imperfect and suppressed, but soon afterwards with screams of undisguised laughter. Some young gentlemen also were in a short time added to the party, who joined in with clapping of hands, and cries of "bravo!" Disgusted by these illiterate and senseless observers, (among whom, I am sorry to say, was a young lady of decided beauty, in whom such conduct seemed to me quite inexcusable) I was at last compelled to leave the "haunts of men" altogether, and betake myself to the wild and lonely vale (vulgarly called the "Hunter's Bog") between Arthur's Seat and Salisbury Craig. *Here* I have continued to prosecute my studies through this winter without molestation. I am surprised (by the way) at your correspondent Z.'s insensibility to the merit of Mr Leigh Hunt's versification. To me it seems excellent; and I doubt not you will perceive in my double endings and other irregularities, a great resemblance to "Rimini." But remember this is not an effect of *imitation*, but a genuine result of my own peculiar system. I therefore hereby give public notice, that I am the *founder* of a new School of Poetry, wholly distinct from the Romantic School, the Eastern School, the Lake School, and the Cockney School. I am the HEAD of the Jumping School, and have already caused twenty-five gold and silver medals to be struck off, with the figure of a "Jumper" in the act of composition on one side, and a Greek inscription on the other. These I shall hereafter distribute among my followers, whom I limit to twenty-five, for no other reason than because I *will* it, just as the first writer of a sonnet *willed* it to be fourteen lines. You will receive inclosed a large packet of minor poems, which I request you will insert from time to time, and am, yours, &c. H. R. M.

NOTICE OF A COURSE OF LECTURES ON ENGLISH POETRY, NOW DELIVERING AT THE SURREY INSTITUTION, LONDON, BY W. HAZLITT, ESQ.

No I.

Lecture First.—On Poetry in general.

The lecture commenced by defining poetry to be the natural impression of any object or feeling, which, by its vividness, excites a voluntary movement of imagination or passion, and produces, by sympathy, a certain modulation of voice or sound expressing it. In treating of poetry, he proposed to speak, first, of the subject matter of it—next, of the forms of expression to which it gives birth—and lastly, of its connexion with harmony of sound. Poetry, he continued, relates to whatever gives immediate pleasure or pain to the human mind. It is not a mere frivolous accomplishment, the trifling amusement of a few idle readers, or leisure hours,—it has been the study and delight of mankind in all ages. He who has a contempt for poetry, cannot have much respect for himself or any thing else. Poetry is to be found every where. Wherever there is a sense of beauty, or power, or harmony, *there* is Poetry. The materials of poetry lie deeper even than those of history. This latter treats only of the external forms and appearances of things,—but poetry is the very substance of which our being is made. The passions and affections of the human mind, whether good or bad, are all poetry. Mr Hazlitt went on to give instances of the truth of these positions, and continued, if poetry is a

dream, the business of life is much the same. Poetry, though an imitation of nature, is not a mere description of natural objects or feelings—these, to become poetry, must be heightened by the imagination. The light of poetry, while it shews us the object on which it falls, throws a radiance on all around it. It suggests forms and feelings, chiefly as they suggest other forms and feelings. The poetical impression of any object is, that uneasy, exquisite sense of beauty or power, that cannot be contained within itself, that strives to link itself to some other object of kindred beauty or grandeur; to enshrine itself in the highest forms of fancy, and to relieve the aching sense of pleasure or pain, by endeavouring to express it in the boldest manner, and by the most striking examples of the same quality in other instances. Poetry is the language of the imagination, and the imagination is that faculty which represents objects, not as they are in themselves, but as they are moulded by our thoughts and feelings. This language is, therefore, not the less true to nature because it is false in point of fact; but so much the more true and natural, if it conveys the impression which the object, under the influence of passion, makes upon the mind. For example, the imagination will distort or magnify any object presented to the senses, when under the influence of fear, and convert it into the resemblance of whatever is most likely to encourage the fear. Here followed numerous and striking illustrations of some of the foregoing positions. Poetry, continued the lecturer, is the highest eloquence of fancy and feeling. As, in describing natural objects, it gives to sensible impressions the forms of fancy, so it describes the feelings of pleasure or pain, by blending them with the movements of passion and the forms of nature. Impassioned poetry is an emanation of the intellectual part of our nature, as well as the sensitive—of the desire to know, the will to act, and the power to feel; and in order to be perfect, ought to appeal to all these. It is for this reason that the domestic tragedies of Moore and Lillo are less natural than those of Shakspeare—for they appeal to the sensibility only. The pleasure derived from tragic poetry, however, springs from our love of strong excitements—for objects of terror or pity hold the same control over the mind as those of love or beauty. Poetry is the highest eloquence of passion, the most vivid form of expression that can be given to our impression of any thing, whether pleasurable or painful, whether mean or dignified. It is the perfect coincidence of the word and thought, with that which we wish to express.

Poetry, then, being the language of imagination and passion, of fancy and will, it is absurd to attempt to reduce the language of poetry to the standard of common sense and reason. The impressions of passion and of indifference can never be the same, therefore they can never be expressed by the same language.

After numerous illustrations, Mr Hazlitt observed, "that the progress of knowledge has undoubtedly a tendency to narrow the limits of the imagination, and clip the wings of poetry; for the province of the imagination is the unknown and undefined. The progress of experimental philosophy has driven the heavens farther off, and made them astronomical—so that there can never be another Jacob's dream."

Mr Hazlitt went on to describe the operations of fancy and imagination on the unknown and the undefined, and the effects which knowledge and civilization have produced on these operations; and then drew a parallel between poetry and painting, in which he described the former as much more *poetical* than the latter, because it gives much more scope to the powers of the imagination—and incidentally spoke of the Greek statues, as seeming, by their beauty, to be raised above the frailties of our nature, and therefore not claiming our sympathy.

The subject matter of poetry Mr Hazlitt described to be, natural imagery or feeling, combined with passion and fancy; and its mode of conveyance, the ordinary use of language combined with musical expression.—He then entered, at some length, into the question, whether verse be *essential* to poetry? and named the Pilgrim's Progress, Robinson Crusoe, and Boccacio's Tales, as the three works coming the nearest to poetry without being so. They are in fact poetry *in kind*, and worthy to become so in *name*, by being "married to immortal verse." Mr Hazlitt gave examples from these works, and then spoke of

Richardson's romances as intensely interesting from their truth and feeling, but not poetical, on account of the infinite number of circumstances by which that interest is brought about. He described all these writers as possessing true poetical genius, but said, that that of Richardson was shackled and confused by circumstances, and, like Ariel in the pine-tree, required artificial aid to set it free.

Mr Hazlitt concluded his introductory lecture with some remarks on the peculiar characteristics of four of the principal works of poetry in the world, viz. Homer, the Bible, Dante, and Ossian. "In Homer the principle of action or life predominates,—in the Bible the principle of faith and the idea of providence;—Dante is a personification of blind will;—and Ossian exhibits the principle of privation, the decay of life, and the lag end of the world. Homer, in the vigour of his intellect, grapples with all the objects of nature, and enters into all the relations of life. There is prodigious splendour, and truth, and force, and variety, in Homer—he describes the bodies as well as souls of men—you see his heroes go forth to battle in their glittering armour, and the old men on the walls of Troy rise up with reverence as Helen passes by them. The poetry of the Bible is abstract, not active—immense, but not multitudinous—the poetry of power but not of form. It does not divide into many, but aggrandises into one. It is the poetry of faith and of solitude. The idea of God, as it became farther removed from humanity and a scattered polytheism, became more profound and intense. Dante exhibits a perpetual struggle of mind to escape from the thraldom in which it had been held by Gothic darkness and barbarism. He stands bewildered, but not appalled, on that dark shore which separates the ancient and modern world. His genius is not like that of Homer, a sparkling flame, but the sullen heat of a furnace. He is power, passion, self-will personified. He is wanting in the fanciful and descriptive part of poetry, but there is a gloomy abstraction—a terrible obscurity—an identity of interest that moulds every object to its own purposes, and clothes all things with the passions of the human soul, —that makes amends for all other deficiencies. His mind, instead of borrowing the power of the objects it contemplates, lends its own power *to them;* and the impression is conveyed to the reader, not from the object to which his attention is directed, but from the impression which he perceives that object to make upon the poet. The immediate objects he brings before the mind are deficient in beauty, and grandeur, and order; but they become effective by means of the force of character which he impresses upon them. He is the severest of all writers—he relies the most on his own power and the sense of it in others, and leaves most to the imagination of his readers. Dante habitually unites the local and individual with the greatest wildness and mysticism—thus half the persons in the Inferno are his own acquaintance." Lastly, Mr Hazlitt spoke of Ossian, whom he could not persuade himself to consider as a mere modern. "Ossian is the decay and old age of poetry. He lives only in the recollections and regrets of the past. There is in Ossian a perpetual sense of privation—a feeling of total desolation—an annihilation of the substance, and an embodying the shadow of all things." Mr Hazlitt concluded, by referring the reader to the lamentation of Selma for the loss of Selgai, as the finest of all in this way.—"If," said he, "it were indeed possible to shew that this writer was nothing, it would only be another blank made in existence,—another void left in the heart,—another confirmation of that feeling which made him so often repeat, 'Roll on, ye dark brown years, ye bring no joy on your wing to Ossian."

Lecture Second.—On Chaucer and Spenser.

Mr Hazlitt began by observing, that both Chaucer and Spenser were under considerable obligations to the early poets of Italy, of whose productions they were in the habit of availing themselves without scruple or acknowledgment. He proceeded to give a short sketch of the life of Chaucer, and then entered into an examination of their respective characteristics as poets. "It is not possible," said he, "for any two writers to be more opposite to each other than Chaucer and Spenser, in that particular part of the poetical character

which springs from personal temperament. Chaucer delighted in severe activity of mind—Spenser in luxurious enjoyment. Chaucer was the most practical of poets, the most a man of business and of the world,—while Spenser was in the highest degree romantic and visionary. Chaucer's poetry has, at least in the relator's mind, the downright reality of daily life. The similies by which he illustrates his images or sentiments have a complete identity with the feeling or thing to which they are compared." Mr Hazlitt gave numerous beautiful examples of this, and continued: "Chaucer speaks of what he wishes to describe with such accuracy and discrimination, that what he relates seems to have actually happened to himself. He dwells precisely on that which would have been dwelt on by the persons really concerned. Yet he never omits any material circumstance, and therefore frequently becomes tedious by keeping close to his subject, as other writers do by digressing from it. The chain of his story consists of many small links closely connected together, and rivetted by a single blow." After illustrating these remarks by examples, Mr H. continued: "Chaucer was content to find grace and beauty in truth; he therefore exhibits the figure with very little drapery thrown over it. His metaphors, which occur but seldom, are for use, not ornament. He does not endeavour to exhibit his power over the reader's mind, but that which his subject held over his own. The readers of Chaucer feel more nearly what the persons he describes must have felt than perhaps those of any other poet; for the sentiments are not the voluntary effusions of the poet's fancy, but are founded on the natural impulses, and habitual prejudices of the characters he represents. He makes no artificial display of his materials, but, on the contrary, seems to withhold them from a strict parsimony. His characters have always a sincerity of feeling, and an inveteracy of purpose, which never relaxes. His muse is no 'babbling gossip of the air,' fluent and redundant—but, like a stammerer, or a dumb person that has just found the use of speech, crowds a number of things together with eager haste—making anxious pauses, and fond repetitions, to prevent mistakes. In consequence of the state of poetry at the time Chaucer wrote, he was obliged to look into nature for himself—to feel his way, as it were—so that his descriptions have a tangible character, which gives them almost the effect of sculpture. In Chaucer the picturesque and the dramatic are closely blended together, for he had an equal eye for the truth of external nature and the discrimination of moral character: and these two qualities were so intimately united in him, that he principally describes external appearances as they indicate internal sentiment. He discovers a meaning in what he sees, and it is this which catches his eye by sympathy." As illustrations of this, Mr H. referred to the dress and costume of the Canterbury pilgrim—of the knight, the squire, the Oxford scholar, &c.

Chaucer's descriptions of natural scenery possess a great deal of *gusto*. They have a certain local truth and freshness, which gives back to the reader the very feelings which belong to the scene. As a striking instance of this, and one of the finest parts in Chaucer, the lecturer referred to the beginning of "The Flower and the Leaf," where a young beauty sits listening to the song of the nightingale. In this description there is no affected rapture, no flowery sentiment—all seems an ebullition of natural delight swelling out of the heart. "Nature," continued Mr Hazlitt, "is the soul of art,—there is a strength as well as simplicity in the imagination, that relies entirely on nature, that nothing else can supply. It was this which enabled Chaucer to describe a deep, internal, and sustained sentiment with more power and pathos than any other writer except Boccacio." Numerous instances of this were mentioned, particularly his description of the patience of Griselda, the faith of Constance, &c. Chaucer also resembled Boccacio in this, that he could at will pass from the most intense pathos to the most extravagant humour, though he never blended the two styles together, but was always intent on what he was about, whether it was jest or earnest. The story of the Cock and Fox was instanced as being full of character and satire, and the Wife of Bath's Prologue as a comic description, which is perhaps unequalled. Mr H. concluded his account of Chaucer by observing, "that

his versification, considering the time at which he wrote, is not one of his least merits;—it has considerable strength and harmony, though it may be apparently deficient in the latter respect, from the changes which have since taken place in accent and pronunciation.

"Though Spenser, like Chaucer, was engaged in active life, the genius of his poetry," said Mr H. "was not active. It was inspired by the love of ease and relaxation. He is the most *poetical* of poets. The two worlds of reality and fiction are poised on the wings of his imagination. Yet his *ideas* seem even more distinct than his *perceptions*. He is the painter of abstractions; but he at times becomes picturesque from his intense love of beauty. Indeed the love of beauty, not of truth, is the moving spring, and the guiding principle, of his mind and imagination. But Spenser has been falsely charged with a want of passion and of strength. He has both in an immense degree. But his pathos is not that of immediate action or suffering, but that of sentiment and romance—that which belongs to distant and imaginary distress." After giving examples to illustrate the foregoing remarks, Mr H. continued: "The language of Spenser is full and copious, even to overflowing, and is enriched and adorned with phrases borrowed from many of the languages of Europe, both ancient and modern. His versification is at once the most smooth and sounding in the language. Indeed the sweetness of it would become cloying, but for its infinite variety of modulation, which is always adapted to the changes of the action and sentiment."

Mr Hazlitt gave examples of the peculiar characteristics of Spenser's versification, and concluded by combating the opinion, that the poetry of Spenser is spoiled by the allegory. "If the reader does not meddle with the allegory," said he, "the allegory, will not meddle with him. If he does not like the allegory, he need only attend to the truth and beauty of the descriptions and sentiments, which are in no degree affected by it."

Lecture Third.—On Shakspeare and Milton.

Mr Hazlitt began by noticing the the peculiar quality of Shakspeare's writings, with reference to, and as distinguished from, those of the other three great poets of England, viz. Chaucer, Spenser, and Milton. "Chaucer," he said, "excelled as the poet of manners or real life—Spenser as the poet of romance—Shakspeare as the poet of nature,—and Milton as the poet of morality. Chaucer describes things as they are—Spenser as we wish them to be—Shakspeare as they would be—and Milton as they ought to be. The characteristic of Chaucer is intensity—of Spencer remoteness—of Milton elevation—of Shakspeare every thing.

"Shakspeare differed from the great men of his own age in this, that in his own genius he combined the peculiar characteristics of all theirs. His mind had no one peculiar bias more than another, but had a universe of thought and feeling within itself, and the power of communication with all other minds, which was indeed its distinctive faculty. He was just like any other man, only that he was like *all* other men. It was not possible to be less of an egotist; for he was nothing in himself, but he was all that others were, or that they could become. His mind reflected ages past, and present, and to come. With him there was no respect of persons; his genius shone alike on the evil and on the good—on the wise and the foolish—the king and the beggar. Every state and condition of mankind was open to his searching glance—even the secrets of the grave were scarcely hid from him. He looked into the hearts and minds of all people, and saw what they did not see or acknowledge even to themselves. Even the world of spirits was not closed to him,—he was familiar with that as with the world of real men and women. He had only to think of a character to become that character, and to be acquainted with every thing belonging to it, to see the very objects by which it would be surrounded—the same local accidents." Examples of this were given, and the lecturer continued: "You do not merely read what Shakspeare's characters *say*, you see how they look—their peculiar physiognomy—the very carriage of their body. That which more than any thing else distinguishes the dramas of Shakspeare from all others, is the wonderful truth and individuality of the characters. Each one is as much itself, and as indepen-

dent of the rest, and of the author, as if they were real persons. Shakspeare identifies himself with his characters in such a manner that his soul seems to pass into their bodies, and to become subject to all their previous associations, and habits, and passions. His plays are not *descriptions*, but *expressions* of the passions. One might suppose that he had stood by and overheard what passed. The dialogues in Shakspeare are carried on without any apparent consciousness of what is to follow—each person comes forward to be asked all sorts of questions, none of which he can anticipate or be prepared for." Here Mr H. illustrated some of the foregoing remarks by references to the characters in Chaucer, and pointed out the distinctive difference between his and Shakspeare's. He then proceeded to describe the delineation of passion in Shakspeare as of the same kind with that of character. "It is not passion growing out of itself, and moulding every thing else to itself, but passion as it is moulded by passion, or habit, or circumstance—by all that is within or without us. It is not like the course of a river, strong and progressive, but like the sea agitated this way and that, lashed by the loud tempest—while in the still pauses of the blast we distinguish only the cries of despair, or the silence of death!"

(Mr Hazlitt here digressed into some observations on a certain modern school of poetry; but as his remarks seemed to apply to the personal characters of those writers, and not their works, it is unnecessary to repeat what he said.) He went on to describe Shakspeare's imagination to be of the same plastic nature as his conception of character or passion. It unites the most opposite extremes. It is at once rapid and devious, "glancing from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven." He takes the widest possible range, and, consequently, has the choice of the greatest variety of materials. He brings things together the most like, and yet placed at the greatest distance from each other; and the more they are strangers to each other, and the longer they have been kept asunder, the more intimate does their union seem to become. After illustrating the foregoing observations by numerous striking examples, Mr Hazlitt spoke of Shakspeare's language and versification. "They," said the lecturer, "are like the rest of him." He has a magic power over words—they come at his bidding, and seem to know their places. His language is hieroglyphical—it translates thought into visible images. It abounds in sudden and elliptical expressions, which are in fact the cause of his mixed metaphors, they bring only abbreviated forms of speech. But these have ceased to be offensive, from their having become idioms of the language. "If one happen to forget a word in any other author," said Mr Hazlitt, "one may, in trying to recollect it, chance to stumble upon another as good; but this could never be the case in Shakspeare." The impassioned language of Shakspeare is always the best, because it is always his own; whereas in ordinary conversation, it sometimes partakes of the affectation of the time. The versification of Shakspeare is at once varied, and sweet, and powerful. His is the only blank verse, except Milton's, that is readable for itself. It is not stately and uniformly swelling, like Milton's, but broken and modified by the inequalities of the ground that it goes over. After speaking of the faults of Shakspeare, and attributing them chiefly to the universality of his genius, and his indifference about fame, and praising his female characters as the finest in the world, Mr Hazlitt concluded his account by saying, "Shakspeare was the least of a coxcomb of any that ever lived, and much of a gentleman."

Mr Hazlitt described Milton as a direct contrast to Shakspeare in every particular. His works are a perpetual invocation to the muses—a hymn to fame. He described the effect of Milton's religious zeal and his political opinions, on his poetical character, and continued, "Milton had a high standard, with which he was always comparing himself. His thoughts dwelt apart from the world, among the nobler forms and fancies that his imagination had created for itself, or that he had found among the mighty models of antiquity." It appears from his prose writings, some of which Mr Hazlitt quoted, that Milton had determined to devote his life to the building up of some mighty work for the delight and wonder of posterity. He did not write from impulse, but girded himself up to the service which he seemed to feel himself called upon

to perform. He always labours, and almost always succeeds. He strives to say the finest things in the world, and he does say them. He adorns and dignifies his subject by all possible means. In his descriptions of beauty, he loads sweets on sweets, "till the sense aches" at them. Milton has borrowed more than any other writer, and yet he has so completely stamped the impress of his own genius, so appropriated it, that it has become his own. His learning has the effect of intuition—he describes objects that he could only have read of in books with the vividness of actual observation. His words tell as pictures. After illustrations of the foregoing, Mr Hazlitt went on to remark, that the interest of the Paradise Lost arises from the passion thrown into the character of Satan, and the account of the happiness of our first parents in Paradise. He then entered at considerable length into the character of Satan, whom he described as the most heroical subject that was ever chosen for a poem, and spoke of the execution being as perfect as the design was lofty. The lecture was closed by some remarks on the particular kind of interest we take about Adam and Eve, and the sources of that interest. Theirs was a situation of perfect enjoyment and repose. The blessings of life were all there, and its ills all to come. It was the first delicious taste of existence—the dawn of the world. All was new, and all was beautiful, and all was good. Their Maker conversed with them—ministering angels attended their steps, and winged messengers from heaven descended in their sight. "Was there nothing in all this," asked Mr Hazlitt, "to interest a certain modern critic? What need was there of action, when the heart was full of bliss without it? They had nothing to do but to enjoy. 'They toiled not, neither did they spin; yet Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these.' They stood a while perfect, but afterward they fell, and were driven out of Paradise, tasting the first fruits of bitterness, as they had of bliss. But even then their tears were 'such as angels weep.' The pathos is of that mild and contemplative kind which arises from the sight of inevitable fate. The chief beauty of this part of the picture is, that there is no intemperate passion, no mental agony, no turbulent action—all is submissive devotion. They received their happiness as a gift from their Creator, and they resign it into his hands, not without sorrowing, but without repining.

'Some natural tears they dropt, but wip'd them soon;
The world was all before them, where to chuse
Their place of rest, and Providence their guide.' "

SOME ACCOUNT OF THE LIFE AND WRITINGS OF ENSIGN AND ADJUTANT ODOHERTY, LATE OF THE 99TH REGIMENT.

If there is something painful to the feelings in the awful ceremonial of consigning a deceased friend to the grave, there is something equally consolatory to our affection in perpetuating the remembrance of his talents and virtues, and gathering for his grave a garland which shall long flourish green among the children of men. This may indeed be termed the last and highest proof of our regard, and it is this task which I am now about to discharge (I fear too inadequately) to my deceased friend, Ensign and Adjutant Odoherty, late of the 99th or king's own Tipperary regiment. In offering to the public some account of the life and writings of this gentleman, I have pleasure in believing that I am not intruding on their notice a person utterly unknown to them. His poems, which have appeared in various periodical publications, have excited a very large portion of the public curiosity and admiration; and when transplanted into the different volumes of the Annual Anthology, they have shone with undiminished lustre amid the blaze of the great poetical luminaries by which they were surrounded. Never was there a man more imbued with the very soul and spirit of poetry than Ensign and Adjutant Odoherty. Cut off in the bloom of his years, ere the fair and lovely blossoms of his youth had time to ripen into the golden fruit by which the autumn of his days would have been beautified and adorned, he has deprived the literature of his country of one of its brightest ornaments, and left us to lament, that youth, virtue, and talents, should