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ART. I. *Reliques of Robert Burns, consisting chiefly of Original Letters, Poems, and Critical Observations on Scottish Songs.* Collected and published by R. H. Cromek. 8vo. pp. 450. London. 1808.

BURNS is certainly by far the greatest of our poetical prodigies— from Stephen Duck down to Thomas Dermody. *They* are forgotten already; or only remembered for derision. But the name of Burns, if we are not mistaken, has not yet ‘gathered all its fame;’ and will endure long after those circumstances are forgotten which contributed to its first notoriety. So much indeed are we impressed with a sense of his merits, that we cannot help thinking it a derogation from them to consider him as a prodigy at all; and are convinced that he will never be rightly estimated as a poet, till that vulgar wonder be entirely repressed which was raised on his having been a ploughman. It is true, no doubt, that he was born in an humble station, and that much of his early life was devoted to severe labour, and to the society of his fellow-labourers. But he was not himself either uneducated or illiterate; and was placed perhaps in a situation more favourable to the development of great poetical talents, than any other which could have been assigned him. He was taught, at a very early age, to read and write; and soon after acquired a competent knowledge of French, together with the elements of Latin and Geometry. His taste for reading was encouraged by his parents and many of his associates; and, before he had ever composed a single stanza, he was not only familiar with many prose writers, but far more intimately acquainted with Pope, Shakespeare and Thomson, than nine tenths of the youth that leave school for the university. These authors, indeed, with some old collections of songs, and the lives of Hannibal and of Sir Wil-

liam Wallace, were his habitual study from the first days of his childhood; and, cooperating with the solitude of his rural occupations, were sufficient to rouse his ardent and ambitious mind to the love and the practice of poetry. He had as much scholarship, we imagine, as Shakespeare, and far better models to form his ear to harmony, and train his fancy to graceful invention.

We ventured, on a former occasion, * to say something of the effects of regular education, and of the general diffusion of literature, in repressing the vigour and originality of all kinds of mental exertion. That speculation was perhaps carried somewhat too far; but if the paradox have proof any where, it is in its application to poetry. Among well educated people, the standard writers of this description are at once so venerated and so familiar, that it is thought equally impossible to rival them, and to write versés without attempting it. If there be one degree of fame which excites emulation, there is another which leads to despair; nor can we conceive any one less likely to add one to the short list of original poets, than a young man of fine fancy and delicate taste, who has acquired a high relish for poetry, by perusing the most celebrated writers, and conversing with the most intelligent judges. The head of such a person is filled, of course, with all the splendid passages of antient and modern authors, and with the fine and fastidious remarks which have been made even on these passages. When he turns his eyes, therefore, on his own conceptions, they can scarcely fail to appear rude and contemptible. He is perpetually haunted and depressed by the ideal presence of those great masters and their exacting critics. He is aware to what comparisons his productions will be subjected among his own friends and associates; and recollects the derision with which so many rash adventurers have been chased back to their obscurity. Thus, the merit of his great predecessors chills, instead of encouraging his ardour; and the illustrious names which have already reached to the summit of excellence, act like the tall and spreading trees of the forest, which overshadow and strangle the saplings which have struck root in the soil below,—and afford shelter to nothing but creepers and parasites.

There is, no doubt, in some few individuals, 'that strong divinity of soul,'—that decided and irresistible vocation to glory, which, in spite of all these obstructions, calls out, perhaps, once or twice in a century, a bold and original poet from the herd of scholars and academical literati. But the natural tendency of their studies, and by far the most common operation, is to repress

* Vol. VIII. p. 329.

press originality, and discourage enterprize; and either to change those whom nature meant for poets, into mere readers of poetry, or to bring them out in the form of witty parodists, or ingenious imitators. Independent of the reasons which have been already suggested, it will perhaps be found too, that necessity is the mother of invention in this as well as in the more vulgar arts; or, at least, that inventive genius will frequently slumber in inaction, where preceding ingenuity has in part supplied the wants of the owner. A solitary and uninstructed man, with lively feelings and an inflammable imagination, will be easily led to exercise those gifts, and to occupy and relieve his mind in poetical composition; but if his education, his reading and his society supply him with an abundant store of images and emotions, he will probably think but little of these internal resources, and feed his mind contentedly with what has been provided by the industry of others.

To say nothing, therefore, of the distractions and the dissipation of mind that belong to the commerce of the world, nor of the cares of minute accuracy and high finishing which are imposed on the professed scholar, there seem to be deeper reasons for the separation of originality and accomplishment; and for the partiality which has led poetry to choose almost all her favourites among the recluse and uninstructed. A youth of quick parts, in short, and creative fancy,—with just so much reading as to guide his ambition, and rough hew his notions of excellence,—if his lot be thrown in humble retirement, where he has no reputation to lose, and where he can easily hope to excel all that he sees around him, is much more likely, we think, to give himself up to poetry, and to train himself to habits of invention, than if he had been encumbered by the pretended helps of extended study and literary society.

If these observations should fail to strike of themselves, they may perhaps derive additional weight from considering the very remarkable fact, that almost all the great poets of every country have appeared in an early stage of their history, and in a period comparatively rude and unlettered. Homer went forth like the morning star before the dawn of literature in Greece; and almost all the great and sublime poets of modern Europe are already between two and three hundred years old. Since that time, although books and readers, and opportunities of reading, are multiplied a thousand fold, we have improved chiefly in point and terseness of expression, in the art of raillery, and in clearness and simplicity of thought. Force, richness and variety of invention, are now at least as rare as ever. But the literature and refinement of the age does not exist at all for a rustic and illiterate

individual; and, consequently, the present time is to him what the rude times of old were to the vigorous writers which adorned them.

But though, for these and for other reasons, we can see no propriety in regarding the poetry of Burns chiefly as the wonderful work of a peasant, and thus admiring it much in the same way as if it had been written with his toes; yet there are peculiarities in his works which remind us of the lowness of his origin, and faults for which the defects of his education afford an obvious cause, if not a legitimate apology. In forming a correct estimate of these works, it is necessary to take into account those peculiarities.

The first is, the undisciplined harshness and acrimony of his invective. The great boast of polished life is the delicacy, and even the generosity of its hostility,—that quality which is still the characteristic as it is the denomination of a gentleman,—that principle which forbids us to attack the defenceless, to strike the fallen, or to mangle the slain,—and enjoins us, in forging the shafts of satire, to increase the polish exactly as we add to their keenness or their weight. For this, as well as for other things, we are indebted to chivalry; and of this Burns had none. His ingenious and amiable biographer has spoken repeatedly in praise of his talents for satire,—we think, with a most unhappy partiality. His epigrams and lampoons appear to us, one and all, unworthy of him;—offensive from their extreme coarseness and violence,—and contemptible from their want of wit or brilliancy. They seem to have been written, not out of playful malice or virtuous indignation, but out of fierce and ungovernable anger. His whole raillery consists in railing; and his satirical vein displays itself chiefly in calling names and in swearing. We say this mainly with a reference to his personalities. In many of his more general representations of life and manners, there is no doubt much that may be called satirical, mixed up with admirable humour, and description of inimitable vivacity.

There is a similar want of polish, or at least of respectfulness, in the general tone of his gallantry. He has written with more passion, perhaps, and more variety of natural feeling, on the subject of love, than any other poet whatsoever,—but with a fervour that is sometimes indelicate, and seldom accommodated to the timidity and ‘sweet austere composure’ of women of refinement. He has expressed admirably the feelings of an enamoured peasant, who, however refined or eloquent he may be, always approaches his mistress on a footing of equality; but has never caught that tone of chivalrous gallantry which uniformly abases itself in the presence of the object of its devotion. Accordingly, instead of
suing

suings for a smile, or melting in a tear, his muse deals in nothing but locked embraces and midnight rencontres; and, even in his complimentary effusions to ladies of the highest rank, is for straining them to the bosom of her impetuous votary. It is easy, accordingly, to see from his correspondence, that many of his female patronesses shrunk from the vehement familiarity of his admiration; and there are even some traits in the volumes before us, from which we can gather, that he resented the shyness and estrangement to which these feelings gave rise, with at least as little chivalry as he had shown in producing them.

But the leading vice in Burns's character, and the cardinal deformity indeed 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. This is the very slang of the worst German plays, and the lowest of our town-made novels; nor can any thing be more lamentable, than that it should have found a patron in such a man as Burns, and communicated to a great part of his productions a character of immorality, at once contemptible and hateful. It is but too true, that men of the highest genius have frequently been hurried by their passions into a violation of prudence and duty; and there is something generous, at least, in the apology which their admirers may make for them, on the score of their keener feelings and habitual want of reflection. But this apology, which is quite unsatisfactory in the mouth of another, becomes an insult and an absurdity whenever it proceeds from their own. A man may say of his friend, that he is a noble-hearted fellow,—too generous to be just, and with too much spirit to be always prudent and regular. But he cannot be allowed to say even this of himself; and still less to represent himself as a hairbrained sentimental soul, constantly carried away by fine fancies and visions of love and philanthropy, and born to confound and despise the cold-blooded sons of prudence and sobriety. This apology evidently destroys itself; for it shows that conduct to be the result of deliberate system, which it affects at the same time to justify as the fruit of mere thoughtlessness and casual impulse. Such protestations, therefore, will always be treated, as they deserve, not only with contempt, but with incredulity; and their magnanimous authors set down as determined profligates, who seek to disguise their selfishness under a name somewhat less revolting. That profligacy is almost always selfishness, and that the excuse of impetuous feeling can hardly ever be justly pleaded for those who neglect the ordinary duties of life, must be apparent, we think, even to the least reflecting of those sons of fancy and song.

It requires no habit of deep thinking, nor any thing more, indeed, than the information of an honest heart, to perceive that it is cruel and base to spend, in vain superfluities, that money which belongs of right to the pale industrious tradesman and his famishing infants; or that it is a vile prostitution of language, to talk of that man's generosity or goodness of heart, who sits raving about friendship and philanthropy in a tavern, while his wife's heart is breaking at her cheerless fireside, and his children pining in solitary poverty.

This pitiful capt of careless feeling and eccentric genius, accordingly, has never found much favour in the eyes of English sense and morality. The most signal effect which it ever produced, was on the muddy brains of some German youth, who left college in a body to rob on the highway, because Schiller had represented the captain of a gang as so very noble a creature.— But in this country, we believe, a predilection for that honourable profession must have preceded this admiration of the character. The style we have been speaking of, accordingly, is now the heroics only of the hulks and the house of correction; and has no chance, we suppose, of being greatly admired, except in the farewell speech of a young gentleman preparing for Botany Bay.

It is humiliating to think how deeply Burns has fallen into this debasing error. He is perpetually making a parade of his thoughtlessness, inflammability and imprudence, and talking with much complacency and exultation of the offence he has occasioned to the sober and correct part of mankind. This odious slang infects almost all his prose, and a very great proportion of his poetry; and is, we are persuaded, the chief, if not the only source of the disgust with which, in spite of his genius, we know that he is regarded by many very competent and liberal judges. His apology, too, we are willing to believe, is to be found in the original lowness of his situation, and the slightness of his acquaintance with the world. With his talents and powers of observation, he could not have seen *much* of the beings who echoed this raving, without feeling for them that distrust and contempt which would have made him blush to think he had ever stretched over them the protecting shield of his genius.

Akin to this most lamentable trait of vulgarity, and indeed in some measure arising out of it, is that perpetual boast of his own independence, which is obtruded upon the readers of Burns in almost every page of his writings. The sentiment itself is noble, and it is often finely expressed;—but a gentleman would only have expressed it when he was insulted or provoked; and would never have made it a spontaneous theme to those friends in whose estimation he felt that his honour stood clear. It is mixed up too in

Burns

Burns with too fierce a tone of defiance ; and indicates rather the pride of a sturdy peasant, than the colour and natural elevation of a generous mind.

The last of the symptoms of rusticity which we think it necessary to notice in the works of this extraordinary man, is that frequent mistake of mere exaggeration and violence, for force and sublimity, which has defaced so much of his prose composition, and given an air of heaviness and labour to a good deal of his serious poetry. The truth is, that his *forte* was in humour and in pathos—or rather in tenderness of feeling ; and that he has very seldom succeeded, either where mere wit and sprightliness, or where great energy and weight of sentiment were requisite. He had evidently a very false and crude notion of what constituted *strength* of writing ; and instead of that simple and brief directness which stamps the character of vigour upon every syllable, has generally had recourse to a mere accumulation of hyperbolical expressions, which incumber the diction instead of exalting it, and show the determination to be impressive, without the power of executing it. This error also we are inclined to ascribe entirely to the defects of his education. The value of simplicity in the expression of passion, is a lesson, we believe, of nature and of genius ;—but its importance in mere grave and impressive writing, is one of the latest discoveries of rhetorical experience.

With the allowances and exceptions we have now stated, we think Burns entitled to the rank of a great and original genius. He has in all his compositions great force of conception ; and great spirit and animation in its expression. He has taken a large range through the region of Fancy, and naturalized himself in almost all her climates. He has great humour,—great powers of description,—great pathos,—and great discrimination of character. Almost every thing that he says has spirit and originality ; and every thing that he says well, is characterized by a charming facility, which gives a grace even to occasional rudeness, and communicates to the reader a delightful sympathy with the spontaneous soaring and conscious inspiration of the poet.

Considering the reception which these works have met with from the public, and the long period during which the greater part of them have been in their possession, it may appear superfluous to say any thing as to their characteristic or peculiar merit. Though the ultimate judgment of the public, however, be always sound, or at least decisive, as to its general result, it is not always very apparent upon what grounds it has proceeded ; nor in consequence of what, or in spite of what, it has been obtained. In Burns's works there is much to censure, as well as much

to praise ; and as time has not yet separated his ore from its dross, it may be worth while to state, in a very general way, what we presume to anticipate as the result of this separation. Without pretending to enter at all into the comparative merit of particular passages, we may venture to lay it down as our opinion,—that his poetry is far superior to his prose ; that his Scottish compositions are greatly to be preferred to his English ones ; and that his Songs will probably outlive all his other productions. A very few remarks on each of these subjects will comprehend almost all that we have to say of the volumes now before us.

The prose works of Burns, consist almost entirely of his letters. They bear, as well as his poetry, the seal and the impress of his genius ; but they contain much more bad taste, and are written with far more apparent labour. His poetry was almost all written primarily from feeling, and only secondarily from ambition. His letters seem to have been nearly all composed as exercises, and for display. There are few of them written with simplicity or plainness ; and though natural enough as to the sentiment, they are generally very strained and elaborate in the expression. A very great proportion of them, too, relate neither to facts nor feelings peculiarly connected with the author or his correspondent,—but are made up of general declamation, moral reflections, and vague discussions,—all evidently composed for the sake of effect, and frequently introduced with long complaints of having nothing to say, and of the necessity and difficulty of letter-writing.

By far the best of these compositions, are such as we should consider as exceptions from this general character,—such as contain some specific information as to himself, or are suggested by events or observations directly applicable to his correspondent. One of the best, perhaps, is that addressed to Dr Moore, containing an account of his early life, of which Dr Currie has made such a judicious use in his Biography. It is written with great clearness and characteristic effect, and contains many touches of easy humour and natural eloquence. We are struck, as we open the book accidentally, with the following original application of a classical image by this unlettered rustic. Talking of the first vague aspirations of his own gigantic mind, he says—we think very finely—‘ I had felt some early stirrings of ambition ; but they were the blind gropings of Homer’s Cyclop round the walls of his cave.’ Of his other letters, those addressed to Mrs Dunlop are, in our opinion, by far the best. He appears, from first to last, to have stood somewhat in awe of this excellent lady, and to have been no less sensible of her sound judgement and strict sense of propriety, than of her steady and generous partiality. The following passage we think is striking and characteristic.

‘ I own myself so little a Presbyterian, that I approve of set times and seasons of more than ordinary acts of devotion, for breaking in on that habituated routine of life and thought which is so apt to reduce our existence to a kind of instinct, or even sometimes, and with some minds, to a state very little superior to mere machinery.

‘ This day ; the first Sunday of May ; a breezy, blue-skyed noon, some time about the beginning, and a hoary morning and calm sunny day about the end, of autumn ;—these, time out of mind, have been with me a kind of holiday.

‘ I believe I owe this to that glorious paper in the Spectator, “ The Vision of Mirza ; ” a piece that struck my young fancy before I was capable of fixing an idea to a word of three syllables. “ On the 5th day of the moon, which, according to the custom of my forefathers, I always keep holy, after having washed myself, and offered up my morning devotions, I ascended the high hill of Bagdat, in order to pass the rest of the day in meditation and prayer.”

‘ We know nothing, or next to nothing, of the substance or structure of our souls, so cannot account for those seeming caprices in them, that one should be particularly pleased with this thing, or struck with that, which, on minds of a different cast, makes no extraordinary impression. I have some favourite flowers in spring, among which are the mountain-daisy, the hare-bell, the fox-glove, the wild brier-rose, the budding birch, and the hoary hawthorn, that I view and hang over with particular delight. I never hear the loud, solitary whistle of the curlew in a summer noon, or the wild mixing cadence of a troop of grey plover in an autumnal morning, without feeling an elevation of soul like the enthusiasm of devotion or poetry. Tell me, my dear friend, to what can this be owing ? Are we a piece of machinery, which, like the Eolian harp, passive, takes the impression of the passing accident ? Or do these workings argue something within us above the trodden clod ?’ II. p. 195—197.

To this we may add the following passage, as a part, indeed, of the same picture.

‘ There is scarcely any earthly object gives me more—I do not know if I should call it pleasure—but something which exalts me, something which enraptures me—than to walk in the sheltered side of a wood, or high plantation, in a cloudy winter-day, and hear the stormy wind howling among the trees, and raving over the plain. It is my best season for devotion : my mind is wrapt up in a kind of enthusiasm to *Him*, who, in the pompous language of the Hebrew bard, “ walks on the wings of the wind.” II. p. 11.

The following is one of the best and most striking of a whole series of eloquent hypochondriasm.

‘ After six weeks confinement, I am beginning to walk across the room. They have been six horrible weeks ;—anguish and low spirits made me unfit to read, write, or think.

‘ I have a hundred times wished that one could resign life as an officer

officer resigns a commission : for I would not *take in* any poor, ignorant wretch, by *selling out*. Lately I was a sixpenny private ; and, God knows, a miserable soldier enough : now I march to the campaign, a starving cadet,—a little more conspicuously wretched.

‘ I am ashamed of all this ; for though I do want bravery for the warfare of life, I could wish, like some other soldiers, to have as much fortitude or cunning as to dissemble or conceal my cowardice.’
II. p. 127, 128.

One of the most striking letters in the collection, and, to us, one of the most interesting, is the earliest of the whole series ; being addressed to his father in 1781, six or seven years before his name had been heard of out of his own family. The author was then a common flax-dresser, and his father a poor peasant ;—yet there is not one trait of vulgarity, either in the thought or the expression ; but, on the contrary, a dignity and elevation of sentiment, which must have been considered as of good omen in a youth of much higher condition. The letter is as follows.

‘ Honoured Sir,—I have purposely delayed writing, in the hope that I should have the pleasure of seeing you on New-year’s-day ; but work comes so hard upon us, that I do not choose to be absent on that account, as well as for some other little reasons, which I shall tell you at meeting. My health is nearly the same as when you were here, only my sleep is a little sounder, and, on the whole, I am rather better than otherwise, though I mend by very slow degrees. The weakness of my nerves has so debilitated my mind, that I dare neither review past wants, nor look forward into futurity ; for the least anxiety or perturbation in my breast, produces most unhappy effects on my whole frame. Sometimes, indeed, when for an hour or two my spirits are a little lightened, I *glimmer* a little into futurity ; but my principal, and indeed my only pleasurable employment, is looking backwards and forwards in a moral and religious way. I am quite transported at the thought, that ere long, perhaps very soon, I shall bid an eternal adieu to all the pains, and uneasinesses, and disquietudes of this weary life ; for I assure you I am heartily tired of it ; and, if I do not very much deceive myself, I could contentedly and gladly resign it.

‘ The soul, uneasy, and confin’d at home,
Rests and expatiates in a life to come.’

‘ It is for this reason I am more pleased with the 15th, 16th, and 17th verses of the 7th chapter of Revelation, than with any ten times as many verses in the whole Bible, and would not exchange the noble enthusiasm with which they inspire me for all that this world has to offer. As for this world, I despair of ever making a figure in it. I am not formed for the bustle of the busy, nor the flutter of the gay. I shall never again be capable of entering into such scenes. Indeed I am altogether unconcerned at the thoughts of this life. I foresee that poverty and obscurity probably await me, and I

am in some measure prepared, and daily preparing to meet them. I have but just time and paper to return you my grateful thanks for the lessons of virtue and piety you have given me; which were too much neglected at the time of giving them, but which, I hope, have been remembered ere it is yet too late.' I. p. 99—101.

Before proceeding to take any particular notice of his poetical compositions, we must apprise our Southern readers, that all his best pieces are written in Scotch; and that it is impossible for them to form any adequate judgment of their merits, without a pretty long residence among those who still use that language. To be able to translate the words, is but a small part of the knowledge that is necessary. The whole genius and idiom of the language must be familiar; and the characters, and habits, and associations of those who speak it. We beg leave too, in passing, to observe, that this Scotch is not to be considered as a provincial dialect,—the vehicle only of rustic vulgarity and rude local humour. It is the language of a whole country,—long an independent kingdom, and still separate in laws, character and manners. It is by no means peculiar to the vulgar; but is the common speech of the whole nation in early life,—and with many of its most exalted and accomplished individuals throughout their whole existence; and, if it be true that, in later times, it has been, in some measure, laid aside by the more ambitious and aspiring of the present generation, it is still recollected, even by them, as the familiar language of their childhood, and of those who were the earliest objects of their love and veneration. It is connected, in their imagination, not only with that olden time which is uniformly conceived as more pure, lofty and simple than the present, but also with all the soft and bright colours of remembered childhood and domestic affection. All its phrases conjure up images of school-day innocence, and sports, and friendships which have no pattern in succeeding years. Add to all this, that it is the language of a great body of poetry, with which almost all Scotchmen are familiar; and, in particular, of a great multitude of songs, written with more tenderness, nature, and feeling, than any other lyric compositions that are extant, and we may perhaps be allowed to say, that the Scotch is, in reality, a highly poetical language; and that it is an ignorant, as well as an illiberal prejudice, which would seek to confound it with the barbarous dialects of Yorkshire or Devon. In composing his Scottish poems, therefore, Burns did not make an instinctive and necessary use of the only dialect he could employ. The last letter which we have quoted, proves, that before he had penned a single couplet, he could write in the dialect of England with far greater purity and propriety than nine-tenths of those who are called well educated in that country. He wrote in Scotch,
because

because the writings which he most aspired to imitate were composed in that language; and it is evident, from the variations preserved by Dr Currie, that he took much greater pains with the beauty and purity of his expressions in Scotch than in English; and, every one who understands both, must admit, with infinitely better success.

But though we have ventured to say thus much in praise of the Scottish poetry of Burns, we cannot presume to lay many specimens of it before our readers; and, in the few extracts we may be tempted to make from the volumes before us, shall be guided more by a desire to exhibit what may be intelligible to all our readers, than by a feeling of what is in itself of the highest excellence.

We have said that Burns is almost equally distinguished for his tenderness and his humour:—we might have added, for a faculty of combining them both in the same subject, not altogether without parallel in the older poets and balladmakers, but altogether singular, we think, among modern critics. The passages of pure humour are entirely Scottish,—and untranslatable. They consist in the most picturesque representations of life and manners, enlivened, and even exalted by traits of exquisite sagacity, and unexpected reflection. His tenderness is of two sorts; that which is combined with circumstances and characters of humble, and sometimes ludicrous simplicity; and that which is produced by gloomy and distressful impressions acting on a mind of keen sensibility. The passages which belong to the former description are, we think, the most exquisite and original, and, in our estimation, indicate the greatest and most amiable turn of genius; both as being accompanied by fine and feeling pictures of humble life, and as requiring that delicacy, as well as justness of conception, by which alone the fastidiousness of an ordinary reader can be reconciled to such representations. The exquisite description of ‘the Cotter’s Saturday Night’ affords, perhaps, the finest example of this sort of pathetic. Its whole beauty cannot, indeed, be discerned but by those whom experience has enabled to judge of the admirable fidelity and completeness of the picture. But, independent altogether of national peculiarities, and even in spite of the obscurity of the language, we are persuaded that it is impossible to peruse the following stanzas without feeling the force of tenderness and truth.

‘ November chill blows loud wi’ angry sigh;
 The short’ning winter-day is near a close;
 The miry beasts retreating frae the plough;
 The black’ning trains o’ craws to their repose;
 The toil-worn Cotter frae his labour goes,
 This night his weekly moil is at an end,

Collects

Collects his spades, his mattocks, and his hoes,
 Hoping the *morn* in ease and rest to spend,
 And weary, o'er the moor, his course does hameward bend.

• At length his lonely cot appears in view,
 Beneath the shelter of an aged tree ;
 Th' expectant *wee-things*, toddlin, stacher thro'
 To meet their Dad, wi' flichterin noise an' glee.
 His wee bit ingle, blinkin bonnily,
 His clean hearth-stane, his thriftie *wifie's* smile,
 The lispin infant prattling on his knee,
 Does a' his weary carking cares beguile,
 An' makes him quite forget his labour an' his toil.

• Belyve the elder bairns come drapping in,
 At service out, amang the farmers roun' ;
 Some ca' the pleugh, some herd, some tentie rin
 A canna errand to a neebor town :
 Their eldest hope, their *Jenny*, woman grown,
 In youthfu' bloom, love sparkling in her e'e,
 Comes hame, perhaps, to shew a braw new gown,
 Or deposite her sair-won penny fee,
 To help her parents dear, if they in hardship be.

• But hark ! a rap comes gently to the door ;
Jenny, wha kens the meaning o' the same,
 Tells how a neebor lad cam o'er the moor,
 To do some errands, and convoy her hame.
 The wily mother sees the conscious flame
 Sparkle in *Jenny's* e'e, and flush her cheek ;
 With heart-struck anxious care, inquires his name,
 While *Jenny* haffins is afraid to speak ;
 Weel pleas'd, the mother hears its nae wild, worthless rake.

• Wi' kindly welcome *Jenny* brings him ben ;
 A strappan youth ; he tak the mother's eye ;
 Blythe *Jenny* sees the visit's no ill ta'en ;
 The father cracks of horses, pleughs, and kye.
 The youngster's artless heart o'erflows wi' joy.
 But blate and laithfu', scarce can weel behave ;
 The mother, wi' a woman's wiles, can spy
 What makes the youth sae bashfu' an' sae grave ;
 Weel pleas'd to think her *bairn's* respected like the lave.

• The cheerfu' supper done, wi' serious face,
 They, round the ingle, form a circle wide ;
 The sire turns o'er, wi' patriarchal grace,
 The big *ha'-Bible*, ance his father's pride :
 His bonnet rev'rently is laid aside,
 His lyart haffets wearing thin an' bare ;
 Those strains that once did sweet in Zion glide,

He wales a portion with judicious care ;
And ' *Let us worship God!* ' he says, with solemn air.

' They chant their artless notes in simple guise ;
They tune their hearts, by far the noblest aim. ' &c.

' Then homeward all take off their sev'ral way ;
The youngling cottagers retire to rest :

The parent pair their *secret homage* pay,
And proffer up to Heaven the warm request

That *He* who stills the raven's clam'rous nest,
And decks the lily fair in flow'ry pride,

Would, in the way his wisdom sees the best,
For them and for their little ones provide ;

But chiefly, in their hearts, with *grace divine* preside. ' ILL. 174-181.

The charm of the fine lines written on turning up a mouse's nest with the plough, will also be found to consist in the simple tenderness of the delineation.

' Thy wee bit *housie*, too, in ruin !
Its silly wa's the wins are strewin !

An' naething, now, to big a new ane,
O' foggage green !

An' bleak December's winds ensuin,
Baith snell and keen !

' Thou saw the fields laid bare an' waste,
An' weary winter comin fast,

An' cozie here beneath the blast,

Thou thought to dwell,

'Till crash ! the cruel *coulter* past

Out thro' thy cell.

' That wee bit heap o' leaves an' stibble,
Has cost thee mony a weary nibble !

Now thou's turn'd out, for a' thy trouble,
But house or hald,

To thole the winter's sleety dribble,

An' cranreuch cauld ! ' III. p. 147.

The verses to a Mountain Daisy, though more elegant and picturesque, seem to derive their chief beauty from the same sentiment.

' Wee, modest, crimson-tipped flow'r,
Thou's met me in an evil hour ;

For I maun crush amang the stoure
Thy slender stem ;

To spare thee now is past my pow'r,
Thou bonnie gem,

' Alas ! it's no thy neebor sweet,
The bonnie *Lark*, companion meet !

Bending

Bending thee 'mang the dewy weat !
 Wi' spreckl'd breast,
 When upward-springing, blythe to greet
 The purpling east.

' Cauld blew the bitter-biting north
 Upon thy early, humble birth ;
 Yet cheerfully thou glinted forth
 Amid the storm,
 Scarce rear'd above the parent earth
 Thy tender form.

' There, in thy scanty mantle clad,
 Thy snawie bosom sun-ward spread,
 Thou lifts thy unassuming head
 In humble guise ;
 But now the *share* uptears thy bed,

And low thou lies !' III. p. 201, 202.

There are many touches of the same kind in most of the popular and beautiful poems in this collection, especially in the *Winter Night*—the address to his old Mare—the address to the Devil, &c. ;—in all which, though the greater part of the piece be merely ludicrous and picturesque, there are traits of a delicate and tender feeling, indicating that unaffected softness of heart which is always so enchanting. In the humorous address to the Devil, which we have just mentioned, every Scottish reader must have felt the effect of this relenting nature in the following stanzas.

' Lang syne, in *Eden's* bonie yard,
 When youthfu' lovers first were pair'd,
 An' all the soul of love they shar'd,
 The raptur'd hour,
 Sweet on the fragrant, flow'ry swaird,
 In shady bow'r :

' Then you, ye auld, snic-drawing dog !
 Ye came to Paradise incog,
 An' gied the infant warld a shog,
 'Maist ruin'd a'.

' But, fare you weel, auld *Nickie-ben* !
 O wad ye tak a thought an' men' !
 Ye aiblins might—I dinna ken—
 Still hae a *stake*—
 I'm wae to think upo' yon den,

Ev'n for your sake !' III. p. 74, 76.

The finest examples, however, of this simple and unpretending tenderness, is to be found in those songs which are likely to transmit the name of Burns to all future generations. He found this

this delightful trait in the old Scottish ballads which he took for his model, and upon which he has improved with a felicity and delicacy of imitation altogether unrivalled in the history of literature. Sometimes it is the brief and simple pathos of the genuine old ballad ; as,

‘ But I look to the West when I lie down to rest,
That happy my dreams and my slumbers may be ;
For far in the West lives he I love best,
The lad that is dear to my baby and me.’

Or, as in this other specimen—

‘ Drumossie moor, Drumossie day,
A waefu’ day it was to me ;
For there I lost my father dear,
My father dear, and brethren three.

‘ Their winding sheet the bluidy clay,
Their graves are growing green to see ;
And by them lies the dearest lad
That ever blest a woman’s e’e !
Now wae to thee, thou cruel lord,
A bluidy man I trow thou be ;
For mony a heart thou hast made sair,
That ne’er did wrong to thine or thee.’ IV. p. 337.

Sometimes it is animated with airy narrative, and adorned with images of the utmost elegance and beauty. As a specimen taken at random, we insert the following stanzas.

‘ And ay she wrought her mammie’s wark,
And ay she sang sae merrilie :
The blythest bird upon the bush
Had ne’er a lighter heart than she.

‘ But hawks will rob the tender joys
That bless the little lintwhite’s nest ;
And frost will blight the fairest flowers,
And love will break the soundest rest.

‘ Young Robie was the brawest lad,
The flower and pride of a’ the glen ;
And he had owsen, sheep, and kye,
And wanton naigies nine or ten.

‘ He gaed wi’ Jeanie to the tryste,
He danc’d wi’ Jeanie on the down ;
And lang ere witless Jeanie wist,
Her heart was tint, her peace was stown.

‘ As in the bosom o’ the stream
The moon-beam dwells at dewy e’en ;
So trembling, pure, was infant love
Within the breast o’ bonnie Jean.’ IV. 80.

Sometimes

Sometimes, again, it is plaintive and mournful, — in the same strain of unaffected simplicity.

‘ O stay, sweet warbling wood-lark, stay,
Nor quit for me the trembling spray !
A hapless lover courts thy lay,
Thy soothing fond complaining.

‘ Again, again that tender part,
That I may catch thy melting art ;
For surely that wad touch her heart,
Wha kills me wi’ disdainin’.

‘ Say, was thy little mate unkind,
And heard thee as the careless wind ;
Oh, noot but love and sorrow join’d,
Sic notes o’ woe could wauken.

‘ Thou tells o’ never-ending care ;
O’ speechless grief, and dark despair ;
For pity’s sake, sweet bird, nae mair !

Or my poor heart is broken !’ IV. 226, 227.

We add the following from Mr Cromek’s new volume ; as the original form of the very popular song given at p. 328. of Dr Currie’s 4th volume.

‘ Ye flowery banks o’ bonie Doon,
How can ye blume sae fair ;
How can ye chant, ye little birds,
And I sae fu’ o’ care !

‘ Thou’ll break my heart, thou bonie bird
That sings upon the bough ;
Thou minds me o’ the happy days
When my fause luvè was true.

‘ Thou’ll break my heart, thou bonie bird.
That sings beside thy mate ;
For sae I sat, and sae I sang,
And wist na o’ my fate.

‘ Aft hae I rov’d by bonie Doon,
To see the woodbine twine,
And ilka bird sang o’ its love,
And sae did I o’ mine.

‘ Wi’ lightsome heart I pu’d a rose
Frac aff its thorny tree,
And my fause luvè staw the rose,
But left the thorn wi’ me.’ V. p. 17, 18.

Sometimes the rich imagery of the poet’s fancy almost overcomes the leading sentiment.

‘ The merry ploughboy cheers his team,
Wi’ joy the tentie seedsman stalks,

But life to me's a weary dream,
A dream of aye that never wauks.

- The wanton coot the water skims,
Amang the reeds the ducklings cry,
The stately swan majestic swims,
And every thing is blest but I.
- The sheep-herd steeks his faulding slap,
And owre the moorlands whistles shill ;
Wi' wild, unequal, wand'ring step
I meet him on the dewy hill.

- And when the lark, 'tween light and dark,
Blythe waukens by the daisy's side,
And mounts and sings on flittering wings,
A woe-worn ghaist I hameward glide.' III. 284, 285.

The sensibility which is thus associated with simple imagery and gentle melancholy, is to us the most winning and attractive. But Burns has also expressed it when it is merely the instrument of torture—of keen remorse and tender agonizing regret. There are some strong traits of the former feeling, in the poems entitled the Lament, Despondency, &c., when, looking back to the time

'When love's luxurious pulse beat high,'
he bewails the consequences of his own irregularities. There is something cumbrous and inflated, however, in the diction of these pieces. We are infinitely more moved with his *Elegy upon Highland Mary*. Of this first love of the poet, we are indebted to Mr Cromek for a brief, but very striking account, from the pen of the poet himself. In a note on an early song inscribed to this mistress, he had recorded in a manuscript book—

'My Highland lassie was a warm-hearted, charming young creature as ever blessed a man with generous love. After a pretty long tract of the most ardent reciprocal attachment, we met, by appointment, on the second Sunday of May, in a sequestered spot by the Banks of Ayr, where we spent the day in taking a farewell, before she should embark for the West-Highlands, to arrange matters among her friends for our projected change of life. At the close of Autumn following, she crossed the sea to meet me at Greenock; where she had scarce landed when she was seized with a malignant fever, which hurried my dear girl to the grave in a few days,—before I could even hear of her illness.' V. 237-8.

Mr Cromek, has added, in a note, the following interesting particulars; though without specifying the authority upon which he details them.

'This adieu was performed with all those simple and striking ceremonies which rustic sentiment has devised to prolong tender emotions and to inspire awe. The lovers stood on each side of a small purling brook; they laved their hands in its limpid stream, and holding

holding a bible between them, pronounced their vows to be faithful to each other. They parted—never to meet again!

‘ The anniversary of *Mary Campbell’s* death (for that was her name), awakening in the sensitive mind of *Burns* the most lively emotion, he retired from his family, then residing on the farm of *Ellisland*, and wandered, solitary, on the banks of the *Nith*, and about the farm yard, in the extremest agitation of mind, nearly the whole of the night: His agitation was so great, that he threw himself on the side of a corn stack, and there conceived his sublime and tender elegy—his address *To Mary in Heaven.* ’ V. 238.

The poem itself is as follows.

- ‘ Thou lingering star, with less’ning ray,
That lov’st to greet the early morn,
Again thou usher’st in the day
My Mary from my soul was torn.
- ‘ O Mary! dear departed shade!
Where is thy place of blissful rest?
See’st thou thy lover lowly laid?
Hear’st thou the groans that rend his breast?
- ‘ That sacred hour can I forget,
Can I forget the hallowed grove,
Where by the winding Ayr we met,
To live one day of parting love!
- ‘ Eternity will not efface
Those records dear of transports past;
Thy image at our last embrace;
Ah! little thought we ’twas our last!
- ‘ Ayr gurgling kissed his pebbled shore,
O’erhung with wild woods, thickening, green;
The fragrant birch, and hawthorn hoar,
Twin’d amorous round the raptur’d scene.
- ‘ The flowers sprang wanton to be prest,
The birds sang love on every spray,
Till too, too soon, the glowing west
Proclaim’d the speed of winged day.
- ‘ Still o’er these scenes my mem’ry wakes,
And fondly broods with miser care;
Time but the impression stronger makes,
As streams their channels deeper wear.
- ‘ My Mary, dear departed shade!
Where is thy place of blissful rest?
See’st thou thy lover lowly laid?
Hear’st thou the groans that rend his breast?’ I. 125-6.

Of his pieces of humour, the tale of *Tam o’ Shanter* is probably the best: though there are traits of infinite merit in *Scotch*

S 2

Drink,

Drink, the Holy Fair, the Hallow E'en, and several of the Songs; in all of which, it is very remarkable, that he rises occasionally into a strain of beautiful description or lofty sentiment, far above the pitch of his original conception. The poems of observation on life and characters, are the 'Twa Dogs, and the various Epistles, —all of which show very extraordinary sagacity and powers of expression. They are written, however, in so broad a dialect, that we dare not venture to quote any part of them. The only pieces that can be classed under the head of pure fiction, are the 'Two Bridges of Ayr, and the Vision. In the last, there are some vigorous and striking lines. We select the passage in which the Muse describes the early propensities of her favourite, rather as being more intelligible, than as superior to the rest of the poem.

“ I saw thee seek the sounding shore,
Delighted with the dashing roar;
Or when the North his fleecy store
Drove through the sky,
I saw grim Nature's visage hear
Struck thy young eye.

“ Or when the deep-green mantl'd earth
Warm cherish'd ev'ry flow'ret's birth,
And joy and music pouring forth
In ev'ry grove,
I saw thee eye the gen'ral mirth
With boundless love.

“ When ripen'd fields, and azure skies,
Call'd forth the reapers' rustling noise,
I saw thee leave their ev'ning joys,
And lonely stalk,
To vent thy bosom's swelling rise
In pensive walk.

“ When youthful love, warm blushing, strong,
Keen-shivering shot thy nerves along,
Those accents, grateful to thy tongue,
Th' adored *Name*,
I taught thee how to pour in song,
To sooth thy flame.

“ I saw thy pulse's maddening play,
Wild send thee Pleasure's devious way,
Mised by Fancy's meteor-ray,
By Passion driven;
But yet the *light* that led astray
Was *light* from heaven.” III. 109-10.

There is another fragment, called a Vision, which belongs to a higher order of poetry. If Burns had never written any thing else,

else, the power of description, and the vigour of the whole composition, would have entitled him to the remembrance of posterity.

- ' The winds were laid, the air was still,
The stars they shot along the sky;
The fox was howling on the hill,
And the distant-echoing glens reply.
- ' The stream adown its hazelly path,
Was rushing by the ruin'd wa's,
Hasting to join the sweeping Nith,
Whase distant roaring swells an' fa's.
- ' The cauld blue north was streaming forth
Her lights, wi' hissing eerie din;
A thort the lift they start and shift,
Like fortune's favours, tint as win.
- ' By heedless chance I turn'd mine eyes,
And by the moon-beam, shook, to see
A stern and stalwart ghaist arise,
Attir'd as minstrels wont to be,
- ' Had I a statue been o' stane,
His darin look had daunted me;
And on his bonnet grav'd was plain,
The sacred posy—Liberty!
- ' And frae his harp sic strains did flow,
Might rous'd the slumb'ring dead to hear;
But oh, it was a tale of woe,
As ever met a Briton's ear!
- ' He sang wi' joy the former day,
He weeping wail'd his latter times.—
But what he said it was nae play,
I wianna ventur't in my rhymes.' IV. 344—46.

Some verses, written for a Hermitage, sound like the best parts of Grongar Hill. The reader may take these few lines as a specimen.

- ' As thy day grows warm and high,
Life's meridian flaming nigh,
Dost thou spurn the humble vale?
Life's proud summits would'st thou scale?
Dangers, eagle-pinioned, bold,
Soar around each cliffy hold,
While cheerful peace, with linnets song,
Chants the lowly dells among.' III. p. 299.

There is a little copy of Verses upon a Newspaper, at p. 355. of Dr Currie's 4th volume, written in the same condensed style, and only wanting translation into English to be worthy of Swift.

The finest piece, of the strong and nervous sort, however, is

undoubtedly the address of Robert Bruce to his army at Bannockburn, beginning, 'Scots, wha hae wi' Wallace bled.' The Death-Song, beginning,

'Farewell, thou fair day, thou green earth and ye skies,
Now gay with the bright-setting sun.'

is to us less pleasing. There are specimens, however, of such vigour and emphasis scattered through his whole works, as are sure to make themselves and their author remembered; for instance, that noble description of a dying soldier.

'Nae cauld, faint-hearted doubtings tease him;
Death comes; wi' fearless eye he sees him;
Wi' bluidy hand a welcome gi'es him;

An' when he fa's,
His latest draught o' breathin lea'es him

In faint huzzas.' III. p. 27.

The whole song of 'For a' that,' is written with extraordinary spirit. The first stanza ends,

'For rank is but the guinea stamp;
The man's the goud, for a' that.'

—All the songs, indeed, abound with traits of this kind. We select the following at random.

'O woman, lovely, woman fair!
An angel form's faun to thy share,
'Twad been o'er meikle to've gi'en thee mair,
I mean an angel mind.' IV. 330.

We dare not proceed further in specifying the merits of pieces which have been so long published. Before concluding upon this subject, however, we must beg leave to express our dissent from the poet's amiable and judicious biographer, in what he says of the general harshness and rudeness of his versification. Dr Currie, we are afraid, was not Scotchman enough to comprehend the whole prosody of the verses to which he alluded. Most of the Scottish pieces are more carefully versified than the English; and we appeal to our Southern readers, whether there be any want of harmony in the following stanza.

'Wild beats my heart to trace your steps,
Whose ancestors, in days of yore,
Thro' hostile ranks and ruin'd gaps
Old Scotia's bloody lion bore:
Ev'n I who sing in rustic lore,
Haply my sires have left their shed,
And fac'd grim danger's loudest roar,
Bold-following where your fathers led! III. p. 233.

The following is not quite English; but it is intelligible to all readers of English, and may satisfy them that the Scottish song-writer was not habitually negligent of his numbers.

'Their

- Their groves o' sweet myrtle let foreign lands reckon,
Where bright-beaming summers exalt the perfume ;
Far dearer to me yon lone glen o' green breckan,
Wi' the burn stealing under the lang yellow broom.
Far dearer to me are yon humble broom bowers,
Where the blue-bell and gowan lurk lowly unseen :
For there, lightly tripping amang the wild flowers,
A listening the linnet, aft wanders my Jean.
- Tho' rich is the breeze in their gay sunny vallies,
And cauld, Caledonia's blast on the wave ;
Their sweet-scented woodlands that skirt the proud palace,
What are they ? The haunt o' the tyrant and slave !
The slave's spicy forests, and gold-bubbling fountains,
The brave Caledonian views wi' disdain ;
He wanders as free as the winds of his mountains,
Save love's willing fetters, the chains o' his Jean.' IV. 228-9.

If we have been able to inspire our readers with any portion of our own admiration for this extraordinary writer, they will readily forgive us for the irregularity of which we have been guilty, in introducing so long an account of his whole works, under colour of the additional volume of which we have prefixed the title to this article. The truth is, however, that unless it be taken in connexion with his other works, the present volume has little interest, and could not be made the subject of any intelligible observations. It is made up of some additional letters, of middling merit,—of complete copies of others, of which Dr Currie saw reason to publish only extracts,—of a number of remarks, by Burns, on old Scottish songs,—and finally, of a few additional poems and songs, certainly not disgraceful to the author, but scarcely fitted to add to his reputation. The world, however, is indebted, we think, to Mr Cromek's industry for this addition to so popular an author ;—and the friends of the poet, we are sure, are indebted to his good taste, moderation and delicacy, for having confined it to the pieces which are now printed. Burns wrote many rash—many violent, and many indecent things ; of which we have no doubt many specimens must have fallen into the hands of so diligent a collector. He has, however, carefully suppressed every thing of this description, and shown that tenderness for his author's memory, which is the best proof of the veneration with which he regards his talents. We shall now see if there be any thing in the volume which deserves to be particularly noticed.

The Preface is very amiable, and well written. Mr Cromek speaks with becoming respect and affection of Dr Currie, the learned biographer and editor of the poet, and with great modesty of his own qualifications.

‘As an apology (he says) for any defects of my own that may appear in this publication, I beg to observe that I am by profession an artist, and not an author. In the manner of laying them before the public, I honestly declare that I have done my best; and I trust I may fairly presume to hope, that the man who has contributed to extend the bounds of literature, by adding another genuine volume to the writings of Robert Burns, has some claim on the gratitude of his countrymen. On this occasion, I certainly feel something of that sublime and heart-swelling gratification, which he experiences, who casts another stone on the CAIRN of a great and lamented chief.’ Pref. p. xi. xii.

Of the Letters, which occupy nearly half the volume, we cannot on the whole express any more favourable opinion than that which we have already ventured to pronounce on the prose compositions of this author in general. Indeed they abound, rather more than those formerly published, in ravings about sensibility and imprudence,—in common swearing, and in professions of love for whisky. By far the best, are those which are addressed to Miss Chalmers; and that chiefly, because they seem to be written with less effort, and at the same time with more respect for his correspondent. The following was written at a most critical period of his life; and the good feelings and good sense which it displays, only make us regret more deeply that they were not attended with greater firmness.

‘Shortly after my last return to Ayrshire, I married “my Jean.” This was not in consequence of the attachment of romance perhaps; but I had a long and much lov’d fellow-creature’s happiness or misery in my determination, and I durst not trifle with so important a deposite. Nor have I any cause to repent it. If I have not got polite tattle, modish manners, and fashionable dress, I am not sickened and disgusted with the multiform curse of boarding-school affectation; and I have got the handsomest figure, the sweetest temper, the soundest constitution, and the kindest heart in the county. Mrs Burns believes, as firmly as her creed, that I am *le plus bel esprit, et le plus honnete homme* in the universe; although she scarcely ever in her life, except the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, and the Psalms of David in metre, spent five minutes together on either prose or verse.—I must except also from this last, a certain late publication of Scots poems, which she has perused very devoutly; and all the ballads in the country, as she has (O the partial lover! you will cry) the finest “wood-note wild” I ever heard.—I am the more particular in this lady’s character, as I know she will henceforth have the honour of a share in your best wishes. She is still at Mauchline, as I am building my house: for this hovel that I shelter in, while occasionally here, is pervious to every blast that blows, and every shower that falls; and I am only preserved from being chilled to death, by being suffocated with smoke. I do not find my farm

farm that pennyworth I was taught to expect; but I believe, in time, it may be a saving bargain. You will be pleased to hear that I have laid aside idle *eclat*, and bind every day after my reapers.

‘To save me from that horrid situation of at any time going down, in a losing bargain of a farm, to misery, I have taken my excise instructions, and have my commission in my pocket for any emergency of fortune. If I could set *all* before your view, whatever disrespect you, in common with the world, have for this business, I know you would approve of my idea.’ V. p. 74, 75.

We may add the following, for the sake of connexion.

‘I know not how the word exciseman, or still more opprobrious, *gauger*, will sound in your ears. I too have seen the day when my auditory nerves would have felt very delicately on this subject; but a wife and children are things which have a wonderful power in blunting these kind of sensations. Fifty pounds a year for life, and a provision for widows and orphans, you will allow is no bad settlement for a *poet*. For the ignominy of the profession, I have the encouragement which I once heard a recruiting serjeant give to a numerous, if not a respectable audience, in the streets of Kilmarnock—“Gentlemen, for your further and better encouragement, I can assure you that our regiment is the most blackguard corps under the crown, and consequently with us an honest fellow has the surest chance for preferment.” V. p. 99, 100.

It would have been as well if Mr Cromek had left out the history of Mr Hamilton’s dissensions with his parish minister,—Burns’s apology to a gentleman with whom he had had a drunken squabble,—and the anecdote of his being used to *ask for more liquor*, when visiting in the country, under the pretext of fortifying himself against the terrors of a little wood he had to pass through in going home. The most interesting passages, indeed, in this part of the volume, are those for which we are indebted to Mr Cromek himself. He informs us, for instance, in a note,

‘One of Burns’s remarks, when he first came to Edinburgh, was, that between the men of rustic life and the polite world he observed little difference—that in the former, though unpolished by fashion, and unenlightened by science, he had found much observation and much intelligence;—but a refined and accomplished woman was a being almost new to him, and of which he had formed but a very inadequate idea.’ V. p. 68, 69.

He adds also, in another place, that ‘the poet, when questioned about his habits of composition, replied,—“All my poetry is the effect of easy composition, but of laborious correction.” It is pleasing to know those things—even if they were really as trifling as to a superficial observer they may probably appear. There is a very amiable letter from Mr Murdoch, the poet’s early preceptor, at p. 111.; and a very splendid one from Mr Bloomfield, at p. 135. As nothing is more rare, among the
minor

minor poets, than a candid acknowledgment of their own inferiority, we think Mr Bloomfield well entitled to have his magnanimity recorded.

‘ The illustrious soul that has left amongst us the name of Burns, has often been lowered down to a comparison with me ; but the comparison exists more in circumstances than in essentials. That man stood up with the stamp of superior intellect on his brow ; a visible greatness : and great and patriotic subjects would only have called into action the powers of his mind, which lay inactive while he played calmly and exquisitely the pastoral pipe.

‘ The letters to which I have alluded in my preface to the “ Rural Tales,” were friendly warnings, pointed with immediate reference to the fate of that extraordinary man. “ Remember Burns,” has been the watch-word of my friends. I do remember Burns ; but I *am not* Burns ! I have neither his fire to fan or to quench ; nor his passions to controul ! Where then is my merit, if I make a peaceful voyage on a smooth sea and with no mutiny on board ? ” V. p. 135, 136.

The observations on Scottish songs, which fill nearly 150 pages, are, on the whole, minute and trifling ; though the exquisite justness of the poet’s taste, and his fine relish of simplicity in this species of composition, is no less remarkable here than in his correspondence with Mr Thomson. Of all other kinds of poetry, he was so indulgent a judge, that he may almost be termed an indiscriminate admirer. We find, too, from these observations, that several songs and pieces of songs, which he printed as genuine antiques, were really of his own composition.

The common-place book, from which Dr Currie had formerly selected all that he thought worth publication, is next given entire by Mr Cromek. We were quite as well, we think, with the extracts ;—at all events, there was no need for reprinting what had been given by Dr Currie ;—a remark which is equally applicable to the letters of which we had formerly extracts.

Of the additional poems which form the concluding part of the volume, we have but little to say. We have little doubt of their authenticity ; for, though the editor has omitted, in almost every instance, to specify the source from which they were derived, they certainly bear the stamp of the author’s manner and genius. They are not, however, of his purest metal, nor marked with his finest die : Several of them have appeared in print already ; and the songs are, as usual, the best. This little lamentation of a desolate damsel, is tender and pretty.

‘ My father pat me frae his door,
My friends they hae disown’d me a’ ;
But I hae ane will tak my part,
The bonie lad that’s far awa.

' A pair o' gloves he gave to me,
 And silken snoods he gave me twa ;
 And I will wear them for his sake,
 The bonie lad that's far awa.

' The weary winter soon will pass,
 And spring will clead the birken-shaw ;
 And my sweet babie will be born,
 And he'll come hame that's far awa.' V. 432, 433.

We now reluctantly dismiss this subject. We scarcely hoped, when we began our critical labours, that an opportunity would ever occur of speaking of Burns as we wished to speak of him : and therefore, we feel grateful to Mr Cromek for giving us this opportunity. As we have no means of knowing, with precision, to what extent his writings are known and admired in the southern part of the kingdom, we have perhaps fallen into the error of quoting passages that are familiar to most of our readers, and dealing out praise which every one of them has previously repeated. We felt it impossible, however, to resist the temptation of transcribing a few of the passages which struck us on turning over the volumes ; and reckon with confidence on the gratitude of those to whom they are new,—while we are not without hopes of being forgiven by those who have been used to admire them.

We shall conclude with two general remarks—the one national, the other critical. The first is, that it is impossible to read the productions of Burns, along with his history, without forming a higher idea of the intelligence, taste, and accomplishments of the peasantry, than most of those in the higher ranks are disposed to entertain. Without meaning to deny that he himself was endowed with rare and extraordinary gifts of genius and fancy, it is evident, from the whole details of his history, as well as from the letters of his brother, and the testimony of Mr Murdoch and others to the character of his father, that the whole family, and many of their associates, who have never emerged from the native obscurity of their condition, possessed talents, and taste, and intelligence, which are little suspected to lurk in those humble retreats. His epistles to brother poets, in the rank of farmers and shopkeepers in the adjoining villages,—the existence of a book-society and debating-club among persons of that description, and many other incidental traits in his sketches of his youthful companions,—all contribute to show, that not only good sense, and enlightened morality, but literature, and talents for speculation, are far more generally diffused in society than is generally imagined ; and that the delights and the benefits of these generous and humanizing pursuits, are by no means confined to those whom leisure and affluence have courted to their enjoyment.

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That much of this is peculiar to Scotland, and may be properly referred to our excellent institutions for parochial education, and to the natural sobriety and prudence of our nation, may certainly be allowed : but we have no doubt that there is a good deal of the same principle in England, and that the actual intelligence of the lower orders will be found, there also, very far to exceed the ordinary estimates of their superiors. It is pleasing to know, that the sources of rational enjoyment are so widely disseminated ; and, in a free country, it is comfortable to think, that so great a proportion of the people is able to appreciate the advantages of its condition, and fit to be relied on in all emergencies where steadiness and intelligence may be required.

Our other remark is of a more limited application ; and is addressed chiefly to the followers and patrons of that new school of poetry, against which we have thought it our duty to neglect no opportunity of testifying. Those gentlemen are outrageous for simplicity ; and we beg leave to recommend to them the simplicity of Burns. He has copied the spoken language of passion and affection, with infinitely more fidelity than they have ever done, on all occasions which properly admitted of such adaptation : but he has not rejected the helps of elevated language and habitual associations ; nor debased his composition by an affectation of babyish interjections, and all the puling expletives of an old nurseymaid's vocabulary. They may look long enough among his nervous and manly lines, before they find any " Good lacks !"—" Dear hearts !"—or " As a body may say," in them ; or any stuff about dancing daffodils and sister Emmelines. Let them think, with what infinite contempt the powerful mind of Burns would have perused the story of Alice Fell and her duffie cloak,—of Andrew Jones and the half-crown,—or of Little Dan without breeches, and his thievish grandfather. Let them contrast their own fantastical personages of hysterical schoolmasters and sententious leechgatherers, with the authentic rustics of Burns's Cotters' Saturday Night, and his inimitable songs ; and reflect on the different reception which these personifications have met with from the public. Though they will not be reclaimed from their puny affectations by the example of their learned predecessors, they may, perhaps, submit to be admonished by a self-taught and illiterate poet, who drew from Nature far more directly than they can do, and produced something so much liker the admired copies of the masters whom they have abjured.