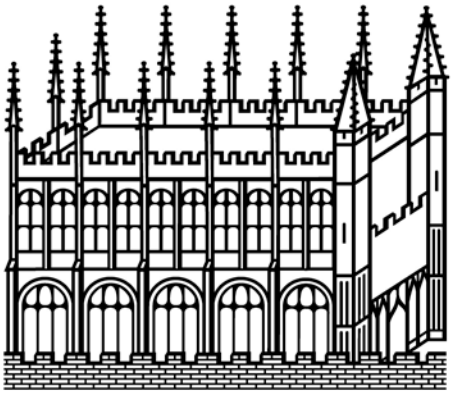

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Carlyle's essay on Burns, with biogr. and critical intr. and notes

Thomas Carlyle

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Burns

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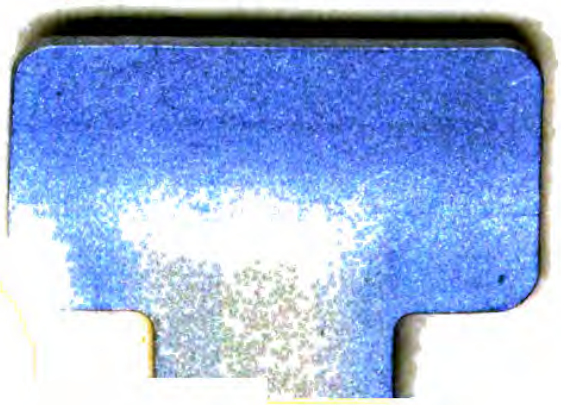

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Carlyle's
Essay on Burns

WITH

BIOGRAPHICAL AND CRITICAL
INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

London
Blackie & Son, Limited, 50 Old Bailey, E.C.
Glasgow and Dublin
1904

Contents

Biographical and Critical Introduction

THOMAS CARLYLE was born at Ecclefechan, in Annandale, in the county of Dumfries, on December 4, 1795, and was the eldest of nine children. His early education began at the burgh-school of Annan, from which, at the remarkably early age of fourteen, he proceeded to the University of Edinburgh with the intention of becoming a minister of the Church of Scotland. Relinquishing this idea, however, he accepted, in 1814, the post of Mathematical Master at Annan, and from that he removed, in 1816, to Kirkcaldy, where he met with Edward Irving, whose influence upon him was destined to be so remarkable. Experience soon convinced him that neither in the Church nor in teaching was his vocation to be found; and, returning to Edinburgh with vague prospects of studying law, he found work on the staff of Brewster's *Edinburgh Encyclopædia*, for which he wrote sixteen articles, and, after the manner of

his favourite, Dr. Johnson, browsed omnivorously on the books in the Advocates' Library.

The influence of German Literature had been spreading in Britain. Carlyle had learned German in order to be able to read books on mineralogy, and speedily discovered the power of the school. Indeed, his essays on Goethe, Richter, Schiller—whose influence he seems to have rather over-estimated,—and upon German literature generally, remain yet the best introduction to a subject upon which so much has been written. The influence of these three writers, along with that of Fichte, remained with him to the close.

An appointment, in 1822, as tutor to the family of Mr. Buller detained him for two years more in Edinburgh, and in the same year he translated Legendre's *Geometry*, prefixing to it an essay on Proportion, which was pronounced a model of exposition and lucidity by such a competent critic as Professor De Morgan. The year 1824–1825 saw Carlyle in London with the Bullers, and he paid a visit to Paris, and introduced himself to Legendre. In 1826 he married Jane Baillie Welsh, the daughter of a Haddington surgeon descended, it was believed, from the son-in-law of the Scottish Reformer John Knox, and, settling for a time in Edinburgh, wrote for the great Whig organ the

Edinburgh Review, whose early history constitutes such an important literary landmark in the nineteenth century. No two greater contrasts could have been found than the keen, wiry, eagerly practical and alert editor, Jeffrey, and the new contributor, whose style, subjects, and treatment were at once the wonder of the readers and the despair of the editor. Carlyle he pronounced to be a man of genius, who had the capacity in him for great things *if*—! Indeed out of the essay on Burns (1828), one of the very finest critical efforts of Carlyle, Jeffrey tried to excise about one-half, and it was only on the obdurate remonstrances of the writer that he finally allowed it to stand entire. This great piece of constructive criticism at once marked Carlyle as a writer of original power, and to-day remains the one perfect utterance on an endless subject to which all subsequent editors and critics have been content to refer, and by the side of which Christopher North's (Professor Wilson) otherwise brilliant essay becomes thin and poor. It is assuredly one of Carlyle's brightest, heartiest, finest pieces. He was then of the same age as Burns at his best; like Burns, very poor, conscious of genius, indignant at neglect, and burning with great thoughts. By birth, by circumstances, by creed, by sympathies—by everything but poetic genius

—Carlyle was the very man to do justice to Burns, to love him, to make us love him, to enter into the poet's soul, to pity his follies, to judge his vices, with such pity and such judgment as the Recording Angel will show when he enters the sentence passed in Heaven on a noble, erring, misunderstood man of genius to whom after a hundred years full justice has been done.

By this time (1828) he had retired to the property of his wife, Craigenputtock, in the parish of Dunscore, Nithsdale, Dumfriesshire. The solitude of the place he found altogether "Druidical", and arrangements were made by which, while he wrote, his brother Alexander was to work the farm. Carlyle, however, was destined in farming to be no more successful than Burns, and on February 7, 1830, he found he had "some five pounds to front the world with", and on the 26th the united capital of the household amounted in all to twelvepence, "in coppers", he adds, with the touch of picturesque humour which never deserted him. All this time he had been engaged on his *Sartor*, in the opinion of many his greatest work, and borrowing £50 from his friend Jeffrey, he set off to London to find a publisher. Murray, Longman, and others were equally obdurate. The eccentricity of the book, no doubt,

struck them, as his general style, so remote from Jeffrey's ideal of the "elegant writer", had the readers of the *Edinburgh Review*. His hour as yet, however, was not to strike. In London he again met his old friend Edward Irving, whose mental decay and wreck from various causes he had to witness, and while still in the south he heard the tidings of the death of his father, upon whom he wrote the great eulogy, so familiar to the readers of the *Reminiscences*, and which, in such strong contrast to Richter, indicates Carlyle, along with Horace, Burns, Scott, Mirabeau, and Goethe, as leaning unmistakably to the influence of the father in the formation of character and disposition. The April of 1832 saw him back once more in Craigenputtock.

A little coldness had sprung up between him and Jeffrey over an application for the Chair of Astronomy at Edinburgh, and Carlyle, in reliance upon his mathematical ability, was eager for Jeffrey to exert on his behalf his influence with the electors. But the latter was righteously obdurate; and it must be confessed that the reference to this episode long after, in the *Reminiscences*, so much to the credit of Jeffrey, is one of the numerous passages in that work which his admirers would fain forget. He hurriedly left Scotland for London, and the

summer of 1834 saw them established in 5 Cheyne Row, Chelsea, which was to be his home till his death.

Sartor, meanwhile, had been appearing in *Fraser*, to the consternation of editor and public. Subscribers and readers, not knowing what to make of it, called loudly for its removal under threats and penalties of the stoppage of their subscriptions; and, curious as is the reflection how narrowly the work escaped extinction, no less strange is the fact that the two voices of friendly recognition came from countries which he loved little, and never did much to conciliate—Emerson in America, and a Catholic priest at Cork,—"audience", no doubt, "fit", if, at least, "few". The fundamental conception of *Sartor* is borrowed from the German philosopher Fichte, according to whom this world is but a Vesture which hides the only real, and Spiritually perceived, world from our sight; and in his essay on Novalis, the mystic, Carlyle has given to the world his own main ideas upon the various contending systems of Thought and Philosophy that divide, and for ever will divide, the minds of men.

The next of his great works, and perhaps the most popular of all, was his *French Revolution*. The fate that had dogged *Sartor* in its completed form fell upon this work in its early

stage. The first volume had been lent in manuscript by Carlyle to John Stuart Mill, who in turn lent it to a friend, whose maid-servant in sweeping out the room had come upon the papers, and had lighted the fire with the bundle. The blow was a heavy one to Carlyle, who had put all the fire and fury of his nature into his subject, and he was a writer that never could, as he said, produce a work without getting ill over it—a feeling that perhaps may explain, if it cannot excuse, much of the unsympathetic criticism he has passed upon Sir Walter Scott, whose fertility of invention was equalled only by the rapidity of his execution. In his hour of distress a course of Captain Marryat's novels served as a tonic; and under the breezy influence of that "most wonderful of post-captains'" heroes of the quarter-deck, he sat doggedly down to reproduce his lost work. Remember one line he could not of what he had written, and he to the last maintained, like the Jews, that the second temple was not equal to the first.

And here there naturally arises the question, how far Carlyle really possessed the qualities of a great historian? The defects of Gibbon, his coldness, lack of moral enthusiasm, are well known. To enthusiasm, indeed, he never rises, much less to the constant fervour at white heat

of our author. He is essentially the product of that eighteenth century on which Carlyle spent so much of his wrath. Gibbon's own contemporary, Johnson, had but a poor opinion of history, and decried it as an old Almanac. He maintained that the historian could only narrate either what was false or true; in the first case he is not a historian but a liar, in the second he has no scope for original powers; for, as truth is one, all must tell what is true in the same way. Macaulay has neatly exposed the fallaciousness of this reasoning by showing that it rests upon a confusion between the process of pure reason and the products of art. He compares the historian with the portrait-painter, whose work, up to a certain point, is purely mechanical, but whose power begins in the process of selection and grouping. The figure, like history, has its background and foreground, and it is in their power of perspective that one historian and one painter differs from another.

How far does Carlyle stand the test? Does he merely narrate, more or less skilfully, after the manner of Hume, Smollett, and Robertson? He himself has quoted Schiller for the belief that the mere picturesque and graphic arts of the historian are really lowest in the scale of his equipment, and that the true power consists in his seizing on the subject as a living organic

whole, and not as a shifting panorama of dazzling views and effects. From this point of view Carlyle may safely be pronounced to have in perfection the qualities of the dramatic artist, and this led him to be unjust to his great contemporary Macaulay, whose work he dismissed with a brief "flow on thou shining river". Of late it has become fashionable to sneer at Lord Macaulay, and to say that, while he is vivid and interesting, he only paints from the outside, and not from within, that he is deficient in the analysis of motives, and is ever ready to sink the historian in the story-teller. But little good can come of this pitting one type of mind against another—the purely and perfectly objective against the subjective, and critics of this nature forget the fundamental agreement in judgment of the two historians upon such typical men as Milton, Mirabeau, Cromwell, and Luther. Much that has been written on the partiality, or its reverse, of great historians really proceeds from a mistake in first principles as to whether impartiality is either possible or a virtue. That Thucydides and Tacitus were partial cannot be seriously doubted—as little as that Macaulay was partial to the great champion of his political party, William of Orange. But, at least, in so many words, they do not deliberately obtrude this, or call atten-

tion to it. That Thucydides is partial to Nicias, as Tacitus to Germanicus, is an inference, but a safe one. But Carlyle, by every law, device, and means of composition, goes deliberately out of his way to call attention to his villains and his heroes. The latter are ever in the foreground of his stage, the former in the pillory behind. That this method of writing history is open to the charge of heightening the virtues of his heroes by the constant depression of his villains in strong relief is obvious, and that the justification of the one is the practical and absolute condemnation of the other — Carlyle, meanwhile, letting no doubt arise as to where his own feelings and sympathies lie. The vindication of Luther condemns Leo X; the judgment upon Cromwell impeaches the Royalists. At every turn, therefore, we may say that Carlyle holds a brief for the defence, and is bent on securing a verdict of guilty against his opponents. To all this we can only reply by using again Macaulay's apposite example of the portrait-painter. The mere cold narrator may be likened to the photographer whose work is scientifically a violation of Art; it is the painter alone who, by seizing a multitude of details beyond the power of reproduction by the camera, heightening here, lowering there, secures a true, perfect, and speaking likeness. Painters differ

in virtue of their relative possession of this gift —historians in their superior or inferior power of analysis, insight, and constructive ability. Carlyle has *seen* his man, Robertson only some *simulacrum* or image of his man. Thus their difference in treatment really rests upon their difference of insight. The figures in Carlyle live and breathe—they are most vitally alive,—while the figures of Robertson, stiff with their historical trappings of gorgeous brocade, remind one of Thackeray's description of the Prince Regent, who, though "the best dressed gentleman in Europe", was but "a mass of waistcoats, gentlemen's waistcoats, field-marshals' waistcoats, all sorts and sizes of waistcoats", never allowing us to see the figure below. Carlyle's own friend, the historian Froude, says of Alison that he wrote twelve octavo volumes to prove Providence was ever on the side of the Tories, but Carlyle was attracted from far different motives to the study of the Revolution and the English Civil War. To him it afforded perennial sermons on the moral law, and for setting forth facts, doctrines, and truths which to him seemed as indisputable as the propositions of Euclid—the chief end of man, his need of heroes to guide him in the right way, the greatness of man, his duties and his rights. What Gibbon thought on man and his destiny

he has not anywhere explicitly declared; a sense of the smallness of man, and of the futility of all his labour here, may be said to be the dominant keynote of his *Decline and Fall*; but in every page and line Carlyle has emphasized his own theories and convictions. Gibbon never kindles; he never for any cause or any man rises to moral enthusiasm. Byron found in him "a solemn sneer"; and, unless it be for Julian or for Athanasius, his chariot wheels are at no time in danger of catching the faintest glow. But Carlyle has mastered his subject, and his subject possesses him and his readers. In the *French Revolution*, out of his head he cannot get the figure of that woman (that haunts also the imagination of John Morley—rising out of the pages of the traveller in France during 1788–1789, Arthur Young, who met her as he walked his horse up a hill in Champagne), who in her misery had heard that somewhere and somehow something was to be done for the poor, hoping it true, *car les tailles et les droits nous écrasent.* "This woman, at no great distance, might have been taken for sixty or seventy, her figure was so bent, and her face so harrowed and hardened by labour, but she said she was only twenty-eight." From a writer so possessed, with splendid dramatic and imaginative powers, and the fullest and easiest command over his

material and authorities, we know what may be expected. In the stately historical minuets of Robertson, Gibbon, and Hume, there is no such feeling, no such possession. They "go in soft raiment and are in kings' houses", but in Carlyle we look for the mantle of the prophet.

And at first it looked as if his reward was to be that of a prophet—if not exactly cast out, he had yet to make his own public. The work brought him no direct or immediate remuneration, and by the advice of Emerson and Miss Harriet Martineau he was induced to give a course of lectures upon German literature, and the result was the considerable sum of £120. Later on he repeated the idea, but it never was congenial, for he felt that by so doing he was sinking the prophecy in the person of the prophet, and parting with a certain sense of reserve.

The year 1838 had seen the great upheaval of popular feeling known as Chartism, and in December, 1839, his book of that name appeared. It was indeed a subject fully to Carlyle's own heart, as a dramatic moralist looking round him on the spectacle of man with his soul crushed out of him, alike unable and unwilling to ask what was the chief end of man. The great hopes of an industrial millennium, and a wave of prosperity to follow in the wake of the Reform

Bill, had hung fire, and seemed foredoomed to disappointment. Rousseau had said that man, everywhere born free, was everywhere in chains, and Mill had lived to declare that every mechanical improvement did but rivet the chains of slavery and bondage stronger on the necks of men. The bold hero of Scott's fine romance *Rob Roy* had found an easy and practical solution by a longing to burn upon the top of Schiehallion the looms and spindles of Glasgow, and the sentimentalist and violently reactionary feeling among many of Carlyle's own contemporaries in the Tory Party would most gladly have adopted the proposal. But the deeper eye of Carlyle saw that, for good or for evil, these things had with us become permanent, and much of what he proposed has been absorbed by the spirit of subsequent legislation, or may yet, in one form or another, be carried out. To him is due the idea of Free Education; his, too, is the idea of nationalized emigration under what he denominates the lead of "Captains of Industry", by which the freezing blood of the nation is ever and anon to be thawed at the fountain of youth, and the pale-faced children of the slums or the crowded industrial districts to assume a ruddier hue in the forests and savannahs of the West. To the same idea he recurs (1843) in his later work, *Past and Present*,

which is one of the strongest of his utterances, and is now the accredited Gospel of Labour. While containing much of his finest writing, it is yet open to the charge of idealizing the past in order to secure the indictment of the present, and curiously reverses the criticism so often passed upon Macaulay's famous third chapter, that it depreciates the England of Charles and James to bring out the great advance of modern progress. This is the book of Carlyle on which his reputation as a political moralist rests, and the best commentary upon it will be found in Mr. Rudyard Kipling's *Flag of England*, and in Froude's lively work *Oceana*. The author's favourite idea of a belt of Anglo-Saxondom running round the globe will await perhaps the next generation under some of the manifold forms of Imperial Federation.

Heroes and Hero-Worship appeared as lectures in 1840. To the general public this is the most acceptable and familiar of his books. His selection of heroes as leaders and kings of men are Odin, Mahomet, Dante, Shakespeare, Luther, Knox, Johnson, Rousseau, Burns, Cromwell, and Napoleon. Before Carlyle wrote, the majority of these men had well-nigh, by concurrent opinion, been definitely classed in the other category, and nothing is more significant of the moral awakening effected by our author than

the revolution produced in the minds of all classes of his contemporaries by the verdicts passed upon these typical men. He had much to meet with in raising some of them to the legitimate heroic stature; indeed Mahomet is still doubtful, and Thackeray can be quoted for the belief that a lie will outlast a truth. Knox, at least in his own land, had never been doubted, and it was only through the ecclesiastical bias of James VI and his Stuart successors that the great fame of the Scottish Reformer had been sapped and mined by the industrious malignity of Court historians. Luther had been largely obscured by the spiritual deadness of the eighteenth century, and by the spirit of Hume and Voltaire, according to which, churches, if tolerated at all, could only justify their existence by their ability to repress fanaticism, or "enthusiasm", that great bugbear of the time. Rousseau in a way is made visible, but with Carlyle he is but half a hero—mere pinchbeck to act in relief to the genuine men. Johnson had been as much benefited as injured by the immortal work of Boswell; and though Macaulay in his brilliant essay had done much for the lexicographer, it is to Carlyle that we must go to find the real man and the stature of his biographer. With Burns we have already dealt; with Cromwell he had his hardest task.

There Hume held the field. The whole influence of Church and State in England for long had been unhesitatingly cast into the scale in order to write down the great Puritan movement and its leader; and to establish his hero as the greatest and most lovable man of his age was a feat for the strongest. And he has succeeded; and since his sketch, followed by the *Life and Letters of Cromwell*, we have heard nothing of the chorus of ecclesiastical and political detraction from the lofty character of the great Ironside.

A word here may be added on his hero-cure, as it has been styled. That man (as Carlyle maintains) is ever animated with a love of great men is true, and History, as the Biography of such, is but the succession of major and minor prophets. By their fruits we are to know them, but the difficulty arises in their recognition; for the great man so often does come to his own, and his own receive him not. How the hero is to manifest himself the author hardly makes clear, much less the inconsistency between this and the practice of the *Sartor*; for the mere test of success would exalt to the level of heroes such characters as Nimrod, Sulla, Louis XIV, or Henry VIII, as, indeed, the last most strongly is in the eyes of Mr. Froude. Dante was not a successful man, still

less Burns, as the world counts success; and the sword of Mahomet is too persistently present to the memory and imagination of his hearers to ensure for his picture of the prophet the victory of our acquiescence. Indeed, at times, it would almost appear, in spite of Carlyle's protests, as if he meant might to be right, and the hero—Napoleon-like—to effect his recognition by force; and, as in his essay on Francia, the dictator of Paraguay, the creed of "the Man with the big Stick" becomes most unduly prominent and painful.

Friends now gathered largely round the writer, for the singular power and freshness of this book had greatly extended his fame. Among them appear the names of Tennyson, Spedding, Thirlwall the historian of Greece, Sterling—indeed, hardly one of his great contemporaries was unknown to Carlyle; and, though his was a nature little calculated to acquire many intimate associates, his correspondence, like that of Kant, from the constant allusion to the same names, shows that if not given to the acquisition of new, he was not deficient in the retention of old friends and faces.

Cromwell was his next work. It was at once received into favour, and, as a solid contribution to the history of the period, is of the

highest value. For the first time the Protector speaks for himself, in his speeches and with his own voice. Nowhere was the work more heartily received than in his own country, where, spite of memories of Dunbar and "the crowning mercy" of Worcester, the victor had always been a popular figure. Into this performance Carlyle put his whole heart, and it was his own favourite among his books. In this work he has secured an entire reversal of the old judgments; and, under his touch, the figure of the usurper and regicide as drawn by the writers of the reactionary Court party for ever disappears from history.

John Sterling followed. In literary form and finish this is his most perfect production. The sense of proportion, so often and so curiously lacking to the mathematical mind of Carlyle, is here happily predominant; and, as a biography of the writer and thinker Sterling, with the great picture of Coleridge, this little book is indispensable for the full understanding of the literary and moral history of our century as a period of transition and change. Carlyle figures in it as a kind of Prospero in the *Tempest*, leading his subject from beginning to the close with the wand of the magician.

His last great work—in extent and volume the greatest of them all—was his *Frederick the*

Great. Here he has the fullest field for his great gifts as a dramatist, moralist, and historian. It is not so much a history as a crowded stage of the most motley nature. But it must be confessed that the Robber of Silesia, and the Kidnapper of tall grenadiers, with his "Vulpine (or foxy) morality", is but a sorry makeshift for a hero. Something of the same kind must have been in the mind of the writer himself when he prefixed to his book the full title of "The History of Frederick II of Prussia, called Frederick the Great". Carlyle spares no pains to exalt his hero to the heroic proportions. Yet the interest of the reader flags in the track of the Prussian King. But as a wonderful historical *tour-de-force* of generals, philosophers, mummers, opera-dancers, field-marshals, kings, battle-pieces, and geographical vignettes, with topics never before attempted in the domain of historical composition till effected by the bold and lawless brush of Carlyle, the book will remain. It is not a book for Macaulay's reader of Plato, "with his feet on the fender"; the attention is strained by the very fulness of the narrative, while the writer hurries us from scene to scene, and round the corner by unexpected turns to the most quaint and tragic transactions. This work occupied Carlyle from 1858 to 1865, and

the labour spent upon it—minute research, investigation of every scene described from visits to the spot with book or map in hand—is enormous, and effectively contrasts with the historians of the eighteenth century.

In 1865 he was elected Lord Rector of his own Alma Mater, the University of Edinburgh, in succession to Mr. Gladstone.

While still in the North, he heard the tidings of the death of his wife, "suddenly snatched from him, and the light of his life as if gone out", on the 21st of April. From that to his death, his life was in a minor key and need not here detain us. His work was done. He wrote his *Reminiscences*, over which, as edited by his literary executor, Mr. Froude, so much bitter gall has been shed. Honours came to him unsought, and the last years of his life passed peacefully away. He died at half-past eight on the morning of the 5th February, 1881, in the eighty-sixth year of his age, and was buried on the 10th at Ecclefechan, by the side of his father and mother.

"The style", says Buffon, "is the man." Emphatically true is this in the case of Carlyle. The aspirant after an easy and perspicuous style was recommended by Johnson to give his days and nights to the volumes of Addison; but, much as Carlyle has to give to his ad-

mirers, an easy style is not among his gifts; and not till another writer arises with similar mental and moral endowments will such a style be rewritten. It is confessedly one of the greatest and most distinctive, and its qualities of force and elevation lie manifest even on the surface. But to all it is not given to bend the bow of Ulysses, and any attempt to imitate the master, with his manifold apostrophes, inversions, exclamations, and interrogations, would but end in the most ludicrous of parodies. Over his own generation his literary influence has been beyond that of any other writer; but it is the fate, or the fortune, of great writers, like great men, not to repeat themselves, and to found a school may be said to be rather the gift of writers in the second order of merit, whose peculiarities and qualities, and intellectual range, admit of an imitation more or less close. The slightest inspection of his works will reveal the extraordinary extent of his vocabulary. The subjects he has chosen are not numerous, and in many of his works the treatment is similar, yet rarely does he use the same idea in the same words. The vocabulary of Shakespeare is said to consist of 15,000 words, and though Carlyle has not been subjected to a similar test, we should infer that of all our writers he comes next.

He ranges the gamut of subjects and sciences with an easy mastery; and strong and masculine as is the effect, it is yet produced without any appearance of effort, and we know that in his conversational moods the same verbal resourcefulness was a marked feature of the man. The staple of Shakespeare is pre-eminently Saxon; this, in the case of Carlyle, is not so clear in the absence of statistics, for he lifts his words from all sources, and, failing the existence of one ready to his hand, he has no hesitation in coining one, with the prerogative, as Horace remarks, of genius if the process is rightly effected.

The humour of Carlyle, which is never biting and fierce like that of Swift, fine and airy like Sterne's, or profoundly wise and genial like the author of *Don Quixote*, is at times boisterous, and the laugh trembles on the verge of the guffaw. Wit, in the peculiarly French sense of pointed sarcasms, he has little, nor did he set much store by it, but of humour, depending as it does on the clear and forceful perception of incongruity between the ideal and the actual, he has abundance.

On all cardinal points of morality and life he leaves no doubt. The sum of it all he gives in his Edinburgh address. It all turns, he said, on "what is the chief end of man?"

That man here or hereafter has to aim at happiness is to him flatly inconceivable, and upon the utilitarian theory of morals he pours the vials of his wrath. Man, he maintains, has to do his Duty without fee or reward, and blessed are those who expect nothing, for they shall not be disappointed. Man deserves nothing; but whatsoever his hand findeth to do, that let him do with all his might. The Rights of Man are nothing to the Duties of Man. *Laborare est orare*: true work is the panacea for the evils of the day, and in the most musical passage he ever wrote, the famous "Two men I honour and no third" from *Sartor*, this gospel of labour is preached with a strength and fervour that carry conviction to all hearers. His great men are the great heroes of labour, men who keep others in the true track; for man left to himself has a distressing tendency to leave it. They lead men higher up with them, and their great stamp is sincerity; they are "loyal to fact". He exhausts even his regal command of diction in his denunciation of every kind of Lies, Hypocrisies, Cant, Moral Putrescence, Puffery, Shams, Phantasms, Falsities, Speciosities, *Simulacra*, and Hearsays. The Quack is a falsehood incarnate. He has no belief in the government of the people by itself; his ideal government is that

of the König, the king who *can*, the Able-man, either by himself, or like the Centurion of the Bible, with good Subordinates set under him in authority. History is the life of such men in action; and in violent contradistinction to the scientific teaching of the day, by which the race is exalted over the individual, and the actions of the humblest atom are tested in the crucible in their influence as a sum total upon events, he regards the actions of the great man as alone of value. The great German historian Niebuhr regarded history as the history of institutions. Carlyle exactly reverses this.

Thus, in his history he is greatest when his great men are on the stage. The interest flags under the delineation of smaller actions. He shines in critical moments, and his imaginative mind hurries with impatience over the details of ordinary situations. Hence his episodes at times rather lack fine shading and proportion; for, as great men do not repeat themselves, great men, in virtue of the same law, are not always on the scene. Much has been written on his Heroes. That it is largely out of keeping with the doctrines of the day, we have seen; yet, writing as he did at a time when the levelling tendencies of the school of Mill and Bentham were predominant, with their assertion of men acting in masses, Carlyle has

done yeoman service by his manful assertion of the moral worth and value of the individual, however much that value may conflict with our author's general teaching on the worth of mankind. But his theory, as fulfilling every legitimate demand of a hypothesis, will remain, and as a contribution to the scientific study of history the book is invaluable in its richness, freshness, and suggestive power. It may be the impatience of the imaginative man, seeing things go wrong, and saying, like David in his haste, all men are liars, or "fools", as Carlyle said—"Millions of men and mostly fools",—that led him to this theory. It may be, also, the great mental and moral endowments of the man, needing little and asking less from his fellowmen, that led him, as Lowell has wittily said, to reverse the action of Saul, for he, seeking asses, found a Kingdom, while Carlyle, seeking the Kingdom, finds men asses! But then his great men are *great moral men*; and when Macaulay comes with the cheery and comforting theory that great men are but those who somehow have got first upon the peaks, and stand at a temporary advantage over their fellows (while, as the day breaks and the rays of the sun flood the valleys and the lower ground, where dwell the ordinary men of the workaday world, bringing them all sooner or

later to a general level of equality, the great men themselves suffer eclipse), Carlyle would have replied that the difference was one of first principles—that such a theory might cover the great men in the sense of Lord Bacon, the men who dowered humanity with the inventions of an Arkwright, a Stephenson, a Watt, and a Faraday, but *his* great men were like Moses on Pisgah, the men who *alone* saw the Promised Land, and through their agency only could meaner men hope to win it.

But the best introduction to Carlyle will ever be Carlyle himself. He is not a writer that reveals himself at the first glance, or yields his finest fruit at the first shake of the tree. He touches nothing, as Johnson said of Goldsmith, that he does not adorn, and to estimate his moral and intellectual influence on the times would be a matter for curious reflections. Without him the literature of the last fifty years would be like the play of *Hamlet* without "the royal Dane"; and, just as Longfellow by his Evangeline, Hiawatha, and Miles Standish has entwined himself at three vital stages in the historical consciousness of the American nation, so Carlyle by his heroes has secured for himself an extended future for his fame; for so long as men are interested in Cromwell, Luther, Burns, and others, so long will they remember

what Carlyle has said of them. From his views deductions may be made; to say that much in the solutions he offers is impracticable is but to confess the difficulty of the problem—the greatness of man and his destiny,—yet when much is deducted more remains. Whether we look on him with Professor Tyndall as a great teacher, or with Professor Huxley as a great tonic, the opinion of Lowell, next to what John Sterling has said, will remain the truest, that Carlyle, lacking only the formative instinct to be a great poet, is the profoundest critic and the most dramatic imagination of modern times.

Carlyle's Essay on Burns

[1828]

In the modern arrangements of society, it is no uncommon thing that a man of genius must, like Butler, "ask for bread and receive a stone"; for, in spite of our grand maxim of supply and demand, it is by no means the highest excellence that men are most forward to recognise. The inventor of a spinning-jenny is pretty sure of his reward in his own day; but the writer of a true poem, like the apostle of a true religion, is nearly as sure of the contrary. We do not know whether it is not an aggravation of the injustice, that there is generally a posthumous retribution. Robert Burns, in the course of Nature, might yet have been living; but his short life was spent in toil and penury; and he died, in the prime of his manhood, miserable and neglected: and yet already a brave mausoleum shines over his dust, and more than one splendid monument has been reared in other places to his fame; the street where he languished in poverty is called by his name; the highest personages in our literature have been proud to appear as his commentators and admirers; and here is the

sixth narrative of his *Life* that has been given to the world!

Mr. Lockhart thinks it necessary to apologise for this new attempt on such a subject: but his readers, we believe, will readily acquit him; or, at worst, will censure only the performance of his task, not the choice of it. The character of Burns, indeed, is a theme that cannot easily become either trite or exhausted; and will probably gain rather than lose in its dimensions by the distance to which it is removed by Time. No man, it has been said, is a hero to his valet; and this is probably true; but the fault is at least as likely to be the valet's as the hero's. For it is certain, that to the vulgar eye few things are wonderful that are not distant. It is difficult for men to believe that the man, the mere man whom they see, nay perhaps painfully feel, toiling at their side through the poor jostlings of existence, can be made of finer clay than themselves. Suppose that some dining acquaintance of Sir Thomas Lucy's, and neighbour of John a Combe's, had snatched an hour or two from the preservation of his game, and written us a Life of Shakspeare! What dissertations should we not have had,—not on *Hamlet* and *The Tempest*, but on the wool-trade, and deer-stealing, and the libel and vagrant laws; and how the Poacher became a Player; and how Sir Thomas and Mr. John had Christian bowels, and did not push him to extremities! In like manner, we believe, with respect to Burns, that till the companions of his pilgrimage, the Honourable

Excise Commissioners, and the Gentlemen of the Caledonian Hunt, and the Dumfries Aristocracy, and all the Squires and Earls, equally with the Ayr Writers, and the New and Old Light Clergy, whom he had to do with, shall have become invisible in the darkness of the Past, or visible only by light borrowed from *his* juxtaposition, it will be difficult to measure him by any true standard, or to estimate what he really was and did, in the eighteenth century, for his country and the world. It will be difficult, we say; but still a fair problem for literary historians; and repeated attempts will give us repeated approximations.

His former Biographers have done something, no doubt, but by no means a great deal, to assist us. Dr. Currie and Mr. Walker, the principal of these writers, have both, we think, mistaken one essentially important thing: Their own and the world's true relation to their author, and the style in which it became such men to think and to speak of such a man. Dr. Currie loved the poet truly; more perhaps than he avowed to his readers, or even to himself; yet he everywhere introduces him with a certain patronising, apologetic air; as if the polite public might think it strange and half unwarrantable that he, a man of science, a scholar and gentleman, should do such honour to a rustic. In all this, however, we readily admit that his fault was not want of love, but weakness of faith; and regret that the first and kindest of all our poet's biographers should not have seen farther, or believed more boldly what

he saw. Mr. Walker offends more deeply in the same kind: and both err alike in presenting us with a detached catalogue of his several supposed attributes, virtues and vices, instead of a delineation of the resulting character as a living unity. This, however, is not painting a portrait; but gauging the length and breadth of the several features, and jotting down their dimensions in arithmetical ciphers. Nay, it is not so much as this: for we are yet to learn by what arts or instruments the mind *could* be so measured and gauged.

Mr. Lockhart, we are happy to say, has avoided both these errors. He uniformly treats Burns as the high and remarkable man the public voice has now pronounced him to be: and in delineating him, he has avoided the method of separate generalities, and rather sought for characteristic incidents, habits, actions, sayings; in a word, for aspects which exhibit the whole man, as he looked and lived among his fellows. The book accordingly, with all its deficiencies, gives more insight, we think, into the true character of Burns, than any prior biography: though, being written on the very popular and condensed scheme of an article for *Constable's Miscellany*, it has less depth than we could have wished and expected from a writer of such power; and contains rather more, and more multifarious, quotations, than belong of right to an original production. Indeed, Mr. Lockhart's own writing is generally so good, so clear, direct and nervous, that we seldom wish to see it making place for another

man's. However, the spirit of the work is throughout candid, tolerant and anxiously conciliating; compliments and praises are liberally distributed, on all hands, to great and small; and, as Mr. Morris Birkbeck observes of the society in the backwoods of America, "the courtesies of polite life are never lost sight of for a moment". But there are better things than these in the volume; and we can safely testify, not only that it is easily and pleasantly read a first time, but may even be without difficulty read again.

Nevertheless, we are far from thinking that the problem of Burns's Biography has yet been adequately solved. We do not allude so much to deficiency of facts or documents,—though of these we are still every day receiving some fresh accession,—as to the limited and imperfect application of them to the great end of Biography. Our notions upon this subject may perhaps appear extravagant; but if an individual is really of consequence enough to have his life and character recorded for public remembrance, we have always been of opinion, that the public ought to be made acquainted with all the inward springs and relations of his character. How did the world and man's life, from his particular position, represent themselves to his mind? How did coexisting circumstances modify him from without; how did he modify these from within? With what endeavours and what efficacy rule over them; with what resistance and what suffering sink under them? In one word, what and how pro-

duced was the effect of society on him; what and how produced was his effect on society? He who should answer these questions, in regard to any individual, would, as we believe, furnish a model of perfection in Biography. Few individuals, indeed, can deserve such a study; and many *lives* will be written, and, for the gratification of innocent curiosity, ought to be written, and read and forgotten, which are not in this sense *biographies*. But Burns, if we mistake not, is one of these few individuals; and such a study, at least with such a result, he has not yet obtained. Our own contributions to it, we are aware, can be but scanty and feeble; but we offer them with good-will, and trust they may meet with acceptance from those they are intended for.

Burns first came upon the world as a prodigy; and was, in that character, entertained by it, in the usual fashion, with loud, vague, tumultuous wonder, speedily subsiding into censure and neglect; till his early and most mournful death again awakened an enthusiasm for him, which, especially as there was now nothing to be done, and much to be spoken, has prolonged itself even to our own time. It is true, the "nine days" have long since elapsed; and the very continuance of this clamour proves that Burns was no vulgar wonder. Accordingly, even in sober judgments, where, as years passed by, he has come to rest more and more exclusively on his own intrinsic merits, and may now be wellnigh shorn of

that casual radiance, he appears not only as a true British poet, but as one of the most considerable British men of the eighteenth century. Let it not be objected that he did little. He did much, if we consider where and how. If the work performed was small, we must remember that he had his very materials to discover; for the metal he worked in lay hid under the desert moor, where no eye but his had guessed its existence; and we may almost say, that with his own hand he had to construct the tools for fashioning it. For he found himself in deepest obscurity, without help, without instruction, without model; or with models only of the meanest sort. An educated man stands, as it were, in the midst of a boundless arsenal and magazine, filled with all the weapons and engines which man's skill has been able to devise from the earliest time; and he works, accordingly, with a strength borrowed from all past ages. How different is *his* state who stands on the outside of that storehouse, and feels that its gates must be stormed, or remain forever shut against him! His means are the commonest and rudest; the mere work done is no measure of his strength. A dwarf behind his steam-engine may remove mountains; but no dwarf will hew them down with the pickaxe; and he must be a Titan that hurls them abroad with his arms.

It is in this last shape that Burns presents himself. Born in an age the most prosaic Britain had yet seen, and in a condition the most disadvantageous, where his mind, if it

accomplished aught, must accomplish it under the pressure of continual bodily toil, nay of penury and desponding apprehension of the worst evils, and with no furtherance but such knowledge as dwells in a poor man's hut, and the rhymes of a Ferguson or Ramsay for his standard of beauty, he sinks not under all these impediments: through the fogs and darkness of that obscure region, his lynx eye discerns the true relations of the world and human life; he grows into intellectual strength, and trains himself into intellectual expertness. Impelled by the expansive movement of his own irrepressible soul, he struggles forward into the general view; and with haughty modesty lays down before us, as the fruit of his labour, a gift, which Time has now pronounced imperishable. Add to all this, that his darksome, drudging childhood and youth was by far the kindliest era of his whole life; and that he died in his thirty-seventh year: and then ask, If it be strange that his poems are imperfect, and of small extent, or that his genius attained no mastery in its art? Alas, his Sun shone as through a tropical tornado; and the pale Shadow of Death eclipsed it at noon! Shrouded in such baleful vapours, the genius of Burns was never seen in clear azure splendour, enlightening the world: but some beams from it did, by fits, pierce through; and it tinted those clouds with rainbow and orient colours, into a glory and stern grandeur, which men silently gazed on with wonder and tears!

We are anxious not to exaggerate; for it is

exposition rather than admiration that our readers require of us here; and yet to avoid some tendency to that side is no easy matter. We love Burns, and we pity him; and love and pity are prone to magnify. Criticism, it is sometimes thought, should be a cold business; we are not so sure of this; but, at all events, our concern with Burns is not exclusively that of critics. True and genial as his poetry must appear, it is not chiefly as a poet, but as a man, that he interests and affects us. He was often advised to write a tragedy: time and means were not lent him for this; but through life he enacted a tragedy, and one of the deepest. We question whether the world has since witnessed so utterly sad a scene; whether Napoleon himself, left to brawl with Sir Hudson Lowe, and perish on his rock, "amid the melancholy main", presented to the reflecting mind such a "spectacle of pity and fear", as did this intrinsically nobler, gentler and perhaps greater soul, wasting itself away in a hopeless struggle with base entanglements, which coiled closer and closer round him, till only death opened him an outlet. Conquerors are a class of men with whom, for most part, the world could well dispense; nor can the hard intellect, the unsympathising loftiness and high but selfish enthusiasm of such persons inspire us in general with any affection; at best it may excite amazement; and their fall, like that of a pyramid, will be beheld with a certain sadness and awe. But a true Poet, a man in whose heart resides some effluence of Wisdom, some tone of the

"Eternal Melodies", is the most precious gift that can be bestowed on a generation: we see in him a freer, purer development of whatever is noblest in ourselves; his life is a rich lesson to us; and we mourn his death as that of a benefactor who loved and taught us.

Such a gift had Nature, in her bounty, bestowed on us in Robert Burns; but with queenlike indifference she cast it from her hand, like a thing of no moment; and it was defaced and torn asunder, as an idle bauble, before we recognised it. To the ill-starred Burns was given the power of making man's life more venerable, but that of wisely guiding his own life was not given. Destiny,—for so in our ignorance we must speak,—his faults, the faults of others, proved too hard for him; and that spirit, which might have soared could it but have walked, soon sank to the dust, its glorious faculties trodden under foot in the blossom; and died, we may almost say, without ever having lived. And so kind and warm a soul; so full of inborn riches, of love to all living and lifeless things! How his heart flows out in sympathy over universal Nature; and in her bleakest provinces discerns a beauty and a meaning! The "Daisy" falls not unheeded under his ploughshare; nor the ruined nest of that "wee, cowering, timorous beastie", cast forth, after all its provident pains, to "thole the sleety dribble and cranreuch cauld". The "hoar visage" of Winter delights him; he dwells with a sad and oft-returning fondness in these scenes of solemn desolation; but

the voice of the tempest becomes an anthem to his ears; he loves to walk in the sounding woods, for "it raises his thoughts to *Him that walketh on the wings of the wind*". A true Poet-soul, for it needs but to be struck, and the sound it yields will be music! But observe him chiefly as he mingles with his brother men. What warm, all-comprehending fellow-feeling; what trustful, boundless love; what generous exaggeration of the object loved! His rustic friend, his nut-brown maiden, are no longer mean and homely, but a hero and a queen, whom he prizes as the paragons of Earth. The rough scenes of Scottish life, not seen by him in any Arcadian illusion, but in the rude contradiction, in the smoke and soil of a too harsh reality, are still lovely to him: Poverty is indeed his companion, but Love also, and Courage; the simple feelings, the worth, the nobleness, that dwell under the straw roof, are dear and venerable to his heart: and thus over the lowest provinces of man's existence he pours the glory of his own soul; and they rise, in shadow and sunshine, softened and brightened into a beauty which other eyes discern not in the highest. He has a just self-consciousness, which too often degenerates into pride; yet it is a noble pride, for defence, not for offence; no cold suspicious feeling, but a frank and social one. The Peasant Poet bears himself, we might say, like a King in exile: he is cast among the low, and feels himself equal to the highest; yet he claims no rank, that none may be disputed to him. The forward

he can repel, the supercilious he can subdue; pretensions of wealth or ancestry are of no avail with him; there is a fire in that dark eye, under which the "insolence of condescension" cannot thrive. In his abasement, in his extreme need, he forgets not for a moment the majesty of Poetry and Manhood. And yet, far as he feels himself above common men, he wanders not apart from them, but mixes warmly in their interests; nay, throws himself into their arms, and, as it were, entreats them to love him. It is moving to see how, in his darkest despondency, this proud being still seeks relief from friendship; unbosoms himself, often to the unworthy; and, amid tears, strains to his glowing heart a heart that knows only the name of friendship. And yet he was "quick to learn"; a man of keen vision, before whom common disguises afforded no concealment. His understanding saw through the hollowness even of accomplished deceivers; but there was a generous credulity in his heart. And so did our Peasant show himself among us; "a soul like an Æolian harp, in whose strings the vulgar wind, as it passed through them, changed itself into articulate melody". And this was he for whom the world found no fitter business than quarrelling with smugglers and vintners, computing excise-dues upon tallow, and gauging alebarrels! In such toils was that mighty Spirit sorrowfully wasted: and a hundred years may pass on, before another such is given us to waste.

All that remains of Burns, the Writings he has left, seem to us, as we hinted above, no more than a poor mutilated fraction of what was in him; brief, broken glimpses of a genius that could never show itself complete; that wanted all things for completeness: culture, leisure, true effort, nay even length of life. His poems are, with scarcely any exception, mere occasional effusions; poured forth with little premeditation; expressing, by such means as offered, the passion, opinion, or humour of the hour. Never in one instance was it permitted him to grapple with any subject with the full collection of his strength, to fuse and mould it in the concentrated fire of his genius. To try by the strict rules of Art such imperfect fragments, would be at once unprofitable and unfair. Nevertheless, there is something in these poems, marred and defective as they are, which forbids the most fastidious student of poetry to pass them by. Some sort of enduring quality they must have: for, after fifty years of the wildest vicissitudes in poetic taste, they still continue to be read; nay, are read more and more eagerly, more and more extensively; and this not only by literary virtuosos, and that class upon whom transitory causes operate most strongly, but by all classes, down to the most hard, unlettered and truly natural class, who read little, and especially no poetry, except because they find pleasure in it. The grounds of so singular and wide a popularity, which extends, in a literal sense, from the palace to the hut, and over all regions where

the English tongue is spoken, are well worth inquiring into. After every just deduction, it seems to imply some rare excellence in these works. What is that excellence?

To answer this question will not lead us far. The excellence of Burns is, indeed, among the rarest, whether in poetry, or prose; but, at the same time, it is plain and easily recognised: his *Sincerity*, his indisputable air of Truth. Here are no fabulous woes or joys; no hollow fantastic sentimentalities; no wiredrawn refinings, either in thought or feeling: the passion that is traced before us has glowed in a living heart; the opinion he utters has risen in his own understanding, and been a light to his own steps. He does not write from hearsay, but from sight and experience; it is the scenes that he has lived and laboured amidst, that he describes: those scenes, rude and humble as they are, have kindled beautiful emotions in his soul, noble thoughts, and definite resolves; and he speaks forth what is in him, not from any outward call of vanity or interest, but because his heart is too full to be silent. He speaks it with such melody and modulation as he can; "in homely rustic jingle"; but it is his own, and genuine. This is the grand secret for finding readers and retaining them: let him who would move and convince others, be first moved and convinced himself. Horace's rule, *Si vis me flere*, is applicable in a wider sense than the literal one. To every poet, to every writer, we might say: Be true, if you would be believed. Let a man but speak forth

with genuine earnestness the thought, the emotion, the actual condition of his own heart; and other men, so strangely are we all knit together by the tie of sympathy, must and will give heed to him. In culture, in extent of view, we may stand above the speaker, or below him; but in either case, his words, if they are earnest and sincere, will find some response within us; for in spite of all casual varieties in outward rank, or inward, as face answers to face, so does the heart of man to man.

This may appear a very simple principle, and one which Burns had little merit in discovering. True, the discovery is easy enough: but the practical appliance is not easy; is indeed the fundamental difficulty which all poets have to strive with, and which scarcely one in the hundred ever fairly surmounts. A head too dull to discriminate the true from the false; a heart too dull to love the one at all risks, and to hate the other in spite of all temptations, are alike fatal to a writer. With either, or, as more commonly happens, with both, of these deficiencies, combine a love of distinction, a wish to be original, which is seldom wanting, and we have Affectation, the bane of literature, as Cant, its elder brother, is of morals. How often does the one and the other front us, in poetry, as in life! Great poets themselves are not always free of this vice; nay, it is precisely on a certain sort and degree of greatness that it is most commonly ingrafted. A strong effort after excellence will sometimes solace itself with a mere shadow of success; he who has

much to unfold, will sometimes unfold it imperfectly. Byron, for instance, was no common man: yet if we examine his poetry with this view, we shall find it far enough from faultless. Generally speaking, we should say that it is not true. He refreshes us, not with the divine fountain, but too often with vulgar strong waters, stimulating indeed to the taste, but soon ending in dislike, or even nausea. Are his Harolds and Giaours, we would ask, real men; we mean, poetically consistent and conceivable men? Do not these characters, does not the character of their author, which more or less shines through them all, rather appear a thing put on for the occasion; no natural or possible mode of being, but something intended to look much grander than nature? Surely, all these stormful agonies, this volcanic heroism, superhuman contempt and moody desperation, with so much scowling, and teeth-gnashing, and other sulphurous humour, is more like the brawling of a player in some paltry tragedy, which is to last three hours, than the bearing of a man in the business of life, which is to last three score and ten years. To our minds, there is a taint of this sort, something which we should call theatrical, false, affected, in every one of these otherwise so powerful pieces. Perhaps *Don Juan*, especially the latter parts of it, is the only thing approaching to a *sincere* work, he ever wrote; the only work where he showed himself, in any measure, as he was; and seemed so intent on his subject as, for mo-

ments, to forget himself. Yet Byron hated this vice; we believe, heartily destested it: nay, he had declared formal war against it in words. So difficult is it even for the strongest to make this primary attainment, which might seem the simplest of all: to *read its own consciousness without mistakes*, without errors involuntary or wilful! We recollect no poet of Burns's susceptibility who comes before us from the first, and abides with us to the last, with such a total want of affectation. He is an honest man, and an honest writer. In his successes and his failures, in his greatness and his littleness, he is ever clear, simple, true, and glitters with no lustre but his own. We reckon this to be a great virtue; to be, in fact, the root of most other virtues, literary as well as moral.

Here, however, let us say, it is to the Poetry of Burns that we now allude; to those writings which he had time to meditate, and where no special reason existed to warp his critical feeling, or obstruct his endeavour to fulfil it. Certain of his Letters, and other fractions of prose composition, by no means deserve this praise. Here, doubtless, there is not the same natural truth of style; but on the contrary, something not only stiff, but strained and twisted; a certain high-flown inflated tone; the stilting emphasis of which contrasts ill with the firmness and rugged simplicity of even his poorest verses. Thus no man, it would appear, is altogether unaffected. Does not Shakspeare himself sometimes premeditate the sheerest bombast! But even with regard

to these Letters of Burns, it is but fair to state that he had two excuses. The first was his comparative deficiency in language. Burns, though for most part he writes with singular force, and even gracefulness, is not master of English prose, as he is of Scottish verse; not master of it, we mean, in proportion to the depth and vehemence of his matter. These Letters strike us as the effort of a man to express something which he has no organ fit for expressing. But a second and weightier excuse is to be found in the peculiarity of Burns's social rank. His correspondents are often men whose relation to him he has never accurately ascertained; whom therefore he is either forearming himself against, or else unconsciously flattering, by adopting the style he thinks will please them. At all events, we should remember that these faults, even in his Letters, are not the rule, but the exception. Whenever he writes, as one would ever wish to do, to trusted friends and on real interests, his style becomes simple, vigorous, expressive, sometimes even beautiful. His letters to Mrs. Dunlop are uniformly excellent.

But we return to his Poetry. In addition to its Sincerity, it has another peculiar merit, which indeed is but a mode, or perhaps a means, of the foregoing: this displays itself in his choice of subjects; or rather in his indifference as to subjects, and the power he has of making all subjects interesting. The ordinary poet, like the ordinary man, is forever seeking in external circumstances the help which

can be found only in himself. In what is familiar and near at hand, he discerns no form or comeliness: home is not poetical but prosaic; it is in some past, distant, conventional heroic world, that poetry resides; were he there and not here, were he thus and not so, it would be well with him. Hence our innumerable host of rose-coloured Novels and iron-mailed Epics, with their locality not on the Earth, but somewhere nearer to the Moon. Hence our Virgins of the Sun, and our Knights of the Cross, malicious Saracens in turbans, and copper-coloured Chiefs in wampum, and so many other truculent figures from the heroic times or the heroic climates, who on all hands swarm in our poetry. Peace be with them! But yet, as a great moralist proposed preaching to the men of this century, so would we fain preach to the poets, "a sermon on the duty of staying at home". Let them be sure that heroic ages and heroic climates can do little for them. That form of life has attraction for us, less because it is better or nobler than our own, than simply because it is different; and even this attraction must be of the most transient sort. For will not our own age, one day, be an ancient one; and have as quaint a costume as the rest; not contrasted with the rest, therefore, but ranked along with them, in respect of quaintness? Does Homer interest us now, because he wrote of what passed beyond his native Greece, and two centuries before he was born; or because he wrote what passed in God's world, and in the heart of man, which

is the same after thirty centuries? Let our poets look to this: is their feeling really finer, truer, and their vision deeper than that of other men, — they have nothing to fear, even from the humblest subject; is it not so,—they have nothing to hope, but an ephemeral favour, even from the highest.

The poet, we imagine, can never have far to seek for a subject: the elements of his art are in him, and around him on every hand; for him the Ideal world is not remote from the Actual, but under it and within it: nay, he is a poet, precisely because he can discern it there. Wherever there is a sky above him, and a world around him, the poet is in his place; for here too is man's existence, with its infinite longings and small acquirings; its ever-thwarted, ever-renewed endeavours; its unspeakable aspirations, its fears and hopes that wander through Eternity; and all the mystery of brightness and of gloom that it was ever made of, in any age or climate, since man first began to live. Is there not the fifth act of a Tragedy in every death-bed, though it were a peasant's, and a bed of heath? And are woo-ings and weddings obsolete, that there can be Comedy no longer? Or are men suddenly grown wise, that Laughter must no longer shake his sides, but be cheated of his Farce? Man's life and nature is, as it was, and as it will ever be. But the poet must have an eye to read these things, and a heart to understand them; or they come and pass away before him in vain. He is a *vates*, a seer; a gift of vision

has been given him. Has life no meanings for him, which another cannot equally decipher; then he is no poet, and Delphi itself will not make him one.

In this respect, Burns, though not perhaps absolutely a great poet, better manifests his capability, better proves the truth of his genius, than if he had, by his own strength, kept the whole Minerva Press going, to the end of his literary course. He shows himself at least a poet of Nature's own making; and Nature, after all, is still the grand agent in making poets. We often hear of this and the other external condition being requisite for the existence of a poet. Sometimes it is a certain sort of training; he must have studied certain things, studied for instance "the elder dramatists", and so learned a poetic language; as if poetry lay in the tongue, not in the heart. At other times we are told, he must be bred in a certain rank, and must be on a confidential footing with the higher classes; because, above all things, he must see the world. As to seeing the world, we apprehend this will cause him little difficulty, if he have but eyesight to see it with. Without eyesight, indeed, the task might be hard. The blind or the purblind man "travels from Dan to Beersheba, and finds it all barren". But happily every poet is born *in* the world; and sees it, with or against his will, every day and every hour he lives. The mysterious workmanship of man's heart, the true light and the inscrutable darkness of man's destiny, reveal themselves not

only in capital cities and crowded saloons, but in every hut and hamlet where men have their abode. Nay, do not the elements of all human virtues and all human vices; the passions at once of a Borgia and of a Luther, lie written, in stronger or fainter lines, in the consciousness of every individual bosom, that has practised honest self-examination? Truly, this same world may be seen in Mossgiel and Tarbolton, if we look well, as clearly as it ever came to light in Crockford's, or the Tuileries itself.

But sometimes still harder requisitions are laid on the poor aspirant to poetry; for it is hinted that he should have *been born* two centuries ago; inasmuch as poetry, about that date, vanished from the earth, and became no longer attainable by men! Such cobweb speculations have, now and then, overhung the field of literature; but they obstruct not the growth of any plant there: the Shakspeare or the Burns, unconsciously and merely as he walks onward, silently brushes them away. Is not every genius an impossibility till he appear? Why do we call him new and original, if *we* saw where his marble was lying, and what fabric he could rear from it? It is not the material but the workman that is wanting. It is not the dark *place* that hinders, but the dim *eye*. A Scottish peasant's life was the meanest and rudest of all lives, till Burns became a poet in it, and a poet of it; found it a *man's* life, and therefore significant to men. A thousand battle-fields remain unsung; but the *Wounded Hare* has not perished without its memorial; a balm of

mercy yet breathes on us from its dumb agonies, because a poet was there. Our *Halloween* had passed and repassed, in rude awe and laughter, since the era of the Druids; but no Theocritus, till Burns, discerned in it the materials of a Scottish Idyl: neither was the *Holy Fair* any *Council of Trent*, or Roman *Jubilee*; nevertheless, *Superstition* and *Hypocrisy* and *Fun* having been propitious to him, in this man's hand it became a poem, instinct with satire and genuine comic life. Let but the true poet be given us, we repeat it, place him where and how you will, and true poetry will not be wanting.

Independently of the essential gift of poetic feeling, as we have now attempted to describe it, a certain rugged sterling worth pervades whatever Burns has written: a virtue, as of green fields and mountain breezes, dwells in his poetry; it is redolent of natural life and hardy natural men. There is a decisive strength in him, and yet a sweet native gracefulness: he is tender, he is vehement, yet without constraint or too visible effort; he melts the heart, or inflames it, with a power which seems habitual and familiar to him. We see that in this man there was the gentleness, the trembling pity of a woman, with the deep earnestness, the force and passionate ardour of a hero. Tears lie in him, and consuming fire; as lightning lurks in the drops of the summer cloud. He has a resonance in his bosom for every note of human feeling; the high and the low, the sad, the ludicrous, the joyful, are welcome in

their turns to his "lightly-moved and all-conceiving spirit". And observe with what a fierce prompt force he grasps his subject, be it what it may! How he fixes, as it were, the full image of the matter in his eye; full and clear in every lineament; and catches the real type and essence of it, amid a thousand accidents and superficial circumstances, no one of which misleads him! Is it of reason; some truth to be discovered? No sophistry, no vain surface-logic detains him; quick, resolute, unerring, he pierces through into the marrow of the question; and speaks his verdict with an emphasis that cannot be forgotten. Is it of description; some visual object to be represented? No poet of any age or nation is more graphic than Burns: the characteristic features disclose themselves to him at a glance; three lines from his hand, and we have a likeness. And, in that rough dialect, in that rude, often awkward metre, so clear and definite a likeness! It seems a draughtsman working with a burnt stick; and yet the burin of a Retzsch is not more expressive or exact.

Of this last excellence, the plainest and most comprehensive of all, being indeed the root and foundation of *every* sort of talent, poetical or intellectual, we could produce innumerable instances from the writings of Burns. Take these glimpses of a snow-storm from his *Winter Night* (the italics are ours):

> When biting Boreas, fell and doure,
> *Sharp shivers* thro' the leafless bow'r,

And Phœbus *gies a short-liv'd glowr*
Far south the lift,
Dim-dark'ning thro' the flaky show'r
Or whirling drift:

'Ae night the storm the steeples rock'd,
Poor labour sweet in sleep was lock'd,
While burns *wi' snawy wreeths upchok'd,*
Wild-eddying whirl,
Or thro' the mining outlet bock'd,
Down headlong hurl.

Are there not "descriptive touches" here? The describer *saw* this thing; the essential feature and true likeness of every circumstance in it; saw, and not with the eye only. "Poor labour locked in sweet sleep"; the dead stillness of man, unconscious, vanquished, yet not unprotected, while such strife of the material elements rages, and seems to reign supreme in loneliness: this is of the heart as well as of the eye!—Look also at his image of a thaw, and prophesied fall of the *Auld Brig*:

When heavy, dark, continued, a'-day rains
Wi' deepening deluges o'erflow the plains;
When from the hills where springs the brawling
Coil,
Or stately Lugar's *mossy* fountains *boil,*
Or where the Greenock winds his *moorland* course,
Or haunted Garpal draws his feeble source,
Arous'd by blust'ring winds and *spotting* thowes,
In mony a torrent down his snaw-broo rowes;
While crashing ice, borne on the roaring speat,
Sweeps dams and mills and brigs a' to the gate;
And from Glenbuck down to the Rottonkey,
Auld Ayr is just one lengthen'd *tumbling* sea:

Then down ye 'll hurl, Deil nor ye never rise!
And *dash the gumlie jaups up to the pouring skies.*

The last line is in itself a Poussin-picture of that Deluge! The welkin has, as it were, bent down with its weight; the "gumlie jaups" and the "pouring skies" are mingled together; it is a world of rain and ruin. In respect of mere clearness and minute fidelity, the *Farmer's* commendation of his *Auld Mare*, in plough or in cart, may vie with Homer's Smithy of the Cyclops, or yoking of Priam's Chariot. Nor have we forgotten stout *Burn-the-wind* and his brawny customers, inspired by *Scotch Drink*: but it is needless to multiply examples. One other trait of a much finer sort we select from multitudes of such among his *Songs*. It gives, in a single line, to the saddest feeling the saddest environment and local habitation:

The pale Moon is setting beyond the white wave,
And Time is setting wi' me, O;
Farewell, false friends! false lover, farewell!
I 'll nae mair trouble them nor thee, O.

This clearness of sight we have called the foundation of all talent; for in fact, unless we *see* our object, how shall we know how to place or prize it, in our understanding, our imagination, our affections? Yet it is not in itself, perhaps, a very high excellence; but capable of being united indifferently with the strongest, or with ordinary powers. Homer surpasses all men in this quality: but strangely enough, at no great distance below him are

Richardson and Defoe. It belongs, in truth, to what is called a lively mind; and gives no sure indication of the higher endowments that may exist along with it. In all the three cases we have mentioned, it is combined with great garrulity; their descriptions are detailed, ample and lovingly exact; Homer's fire bursts through, from time to time, as if by accident; but Defoe and Richardson have no fire. Burns, again, is not more distinguished by the clearness than by the impetuous force of his conceptions. Of the strength, the piercing emphasis with which he thought, his emphasis of expression may give a humble but the readiest proof. Who ever uttered sharper sayings than his; words more memorable, now by their burning vehemence, now by their cool vigour and laconic pith? A single phrase depicts a whole subject, a whole scene. We hear of "a gentleman that derived his patent of nobility direct from Almighty God". Our Scottish forefathers in the battle-field struggled forward "*red-wat-shod*": in this one word, a full vision of horror and carnage, perhaps too frightfully accurate for Art!

In fact, one of the leading features in the mind of Burns is this vigour of his strictly intellectual perceptions. A resolute force is ever visible in his judgments, and in his feelings and volitions. Professor Stewart says of him, with some surprise: "All the faculties of Burns's mind were, as far as I could judge, equally vigorous; and his predilection for poetry was rather the result of his own enthusiastic and

impassioned temper, than of a genius exclusively adapted to that species of composition. From his conversation I should have pronounced him to be fitted to excel in whatever walk of ambition he had chosen to exert his abilities." But this, if we mistake not, is at all times the very essence of a truly poetical endowment. Poetry, except in such cases as that of Keats, where the whole consists in a weak-eyed maudlin sensibility, and a certain vague random tunefulness of nature, is no separate faculty, no organ which can be superadded to the rest, or disjoined from them; but rather the result of their general harmony and completion. The feelings, the gifts that exist in the Poet, are those that exist, with more or less development, in every human soul: the imagination, which shudders at the Hell of Dante, is the same faculty, weaker in degree, which called that picture into being. How does the Poet speak to men, with power, but by being still more a man than they? Shakspeare, it has been well observed, in the planning and completing of his tragedies, has shown an Understanding, were it nothing more, which might have governed states, or indited a *Novum Organum*. What Burns's force of understanding may have been, we have less means of judging: it had to dwell among the humblest objects; never saw Philosophy; never rose, except by natural effort and for short intervals, into the region of great ideas. Nevertheless, sufficient indication, if no proof sufficient, remains for us in his works: we discern the

brawny movements of a gigantic though untutored strength; and can understand how, in conversation, his quick sure insight into men and things may, as much as aught else about him, have amazed the best thinkers of his time and country.

But, unless we mistake, the intellectual gift of Burns is fine as well as strong. The more delicate relations of things could not well have escaped his eye, for they were intimately present to his heart. The logic of the senate and the forum is indispensable, but not all-sufficient; nay, perhaps the highest Truth is that which will the most certainly elude it. For this logic works by words, and "the highest", it has been said, "cannot be expressed in words". We are not without tokens of an openness for this higher truth also, of a keen though uncultivated sense for it, having existed in Burns. Mr. Stewart, it will be remembered, "wonders", in the passage above quoted, that Burns had formed some distinct conception of the "doctrine of association". We rather think that far subtler things than the doctrine of association had from of old been familiar to him. Here for instance:

"We know nothing," thus writes he, "or next to nothing, of the structure of our souls, so we 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 harebell, 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 gray 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 Æolian harp, passive, takes the impression of the passing accident; or do these workings argue something within us above the trodden clod? I own myself partial to such proofs of those awful and important realities: a God that made all things, man's immaterial and immortal nature, and a world of weal or wo beyond death and the grave."

Force and fineness of understanding are often spoken of as something different from general force and fineness of nature, as something partly independent of them. The necessities of language so require it; but in truth these qualities are not distinct and independent: except in special cases, and from special causes, they ever go together. A man of strong understanding is generally a man of strong character; neither is delicacy in the one kind often divided from delicacy in the other. No one, at all events, is ignorant that in the Poetry of Burns, keenness of insight keeps pace with keenness of feeling; that his *light* is not more pervading than his *warmth*. He is a man of the most impassioned temper; with passions not strong only, but noble, and of the sort in which great virtues and great poems take their rise. It is reverence, it is love towards all Nature that

inspires him, that opens his eyes to its beauty, and makes heart and voice eloquent in its praise. There is a true old saying, that "Love furthers knowledge": but above all, it is the living essence of that knowledge which makes poets; the first principle of its existence, increase, activity. Of Burns's fervid affection, his generous all-embracing Love, we have spoken already, as of the grand distinction of his nature, seen equally in word and deed, in his Life and in his Writings. It were easy to multiply examples. Not man only, but all that environs man in the material and moral universe, is lovely in his sight: "the hoary hawthorn", the "troop of gray plover", the "solitary curlew", all are dear to him; all live in this Earth along with him, and to all he is knit as in mysterious brotherhood. How touching is it, for instance, that, amidst the gloom of personal misery, brooding over the wintry desolation without him and within him, he thinks of the "ourie cattle" and "silly sheep", and their sufferings in the pitiless storm!

I thought me on the ourie cattle,
Or silly sheep, wha bide this brattle
O' wintry war,
Or thro' the drift, deep-lairing, sprattle,
Beneath a scaur.
Ilk happing bird, wee helpless thing,
That in the merry months o' spring
Delighted me to hear thee sing,
What comes o' thee?
Where wilt thou cow'r thy chittering wing,
And close thy ee?

The tenant of the mean hut, with its "ragged roof and chinky wall", has a heart to pity even these! This is worth several homilies on Mercy; for it is the voice of Mercy herself. Burns, indeed, lives in sympathy; his soul rushes forth into all realms of being; nothing that has existence can be indifferent to him. The very Devil he cannot hate with right orthodoxy:

> But fare you weel, auld Nickie-ben;
> O wad ye tak a thought and men'!
> Ye aiblins might,—I dinna ken,—
> Still hae a stake;
> I 'm wae to think upo' yon den,
> Even for your sake!

"*He* is the father of curses and lies," said Dr. Slop; "and is cursed and damned already."—"I am sorry for it," quoth my uncle Toby!—A Poet without Love were a physical and metaphysical impossibility.

But has it not been said in contradiction to this principle, that "Indignation makes verses"? It has been so said, and is true enough: but the contradiction is apparent, not real. The Indignation which makes verses is, properly speaking, an inverted Love; the love of some right, some worth, some goodness, belonging to ourselves or others, which has been injured, and which this tempestuous feeling issues forth to defend and avenge. No selfish fury of heart, existing there as a primary feeling, and without its opposite, ever produced much Poetry: otherwise, we suppose, the Tiger were the

most musical of all our choristers. Johnson said, he loved a good hater; by which he must have meant, not so much one that hated violently, as one that hated wisely; hated baseness from love of nobleness. However, in spite of Johnson's paradox, tolerable enough for once in speech, but which need not have been so often adopted in print since then, we rather believe that good men deal sparingly in hatred, either wise or unwise: nay that a "good" hater is still a desideratum in this world. The Devil, at least, who passes for the chief and best of that class, is said to be nowise an amiable character.

Of the verses which Indignation makes, Burns has also given us specimens: and among the best that were ever given. Who will forget his "*Dweller in yon Dungeon dark*"; a piece that might have been chaunted by the Furies of Æschylus? The secrets of the infernal Pit are laid bare; a boundless baleful "darkness visible"; and streaks of hell-fire quivering madly in its black haggard bosom!

> Dweller in yon Dungeon dark,
> Hangman of Creation, mark!
> Who in widow's weeds appears,
> Laden with unhonoured years,
> Noosing with care a bursting purse,
> Baited with many a deadly curse!

Why should we speak of *Scots wha hae wi' Wallace bled*; since all know of it, from the king to the meanest of his subjects? This dithyrambic was composed on horseback; in

riding in the middle of tempests, over the wildest Galloway moor, in company with a Mr. Syme, who, observing the poet's looks, forebore to speak,—judiciously enough, for a man composing *Bruce's Address* might be unsafe to trifle with. Doubtless this stern hymn was singing itself, as he formed it, through the soul of Burns: but to the external ear, it should be sung with the throat of the whirlwind. So long as there is warm blood in the heart of Scotchman or man, it will move in fierce thrills under this war-ode; the best, we believe, that was ever written by any pen.

Another wild stormful Song, that dwells in our ear and mind with a strange tenacity, is *Macpherson's Farewell.* Perhaps there is something in the tradition itself that coöperates. For was not this grim Celt, this shaggy Northland Cacus, that "lived a life of sturt and strife, and died by treacherie", was not he too one of the Nimrods and Napoleons of the earth, in the arena of his own remote misty glens, for want of a clearer and wider one? Nay, was there not a touch of grace given him? A fibre of love and softness, of poetry itself, must have lived in his savage heart: for he composed that air the night before his execution; on the wings of that poor melody, his better soul would soar away above oblivion, pain and all the ignominy and despair, which, like an avalanche, was hurling him to the abyss! Here also, as at Thebes, and in Pelops' line, was material Fate matched against man's Free-will; matched in bitterest though obscure duel; and

the ethereal soul sank not, even in its blindness, without a cry which has survived it. But who, except Burns, could have given words to such a soul; words that we never listen to without a strange half-barbarous, half-poetic fellow-feeling?

Sae rantingly, sae wantonly,
Sae dauntingly gaed he;
He play'd a spring, and danced it round,
Below the gallows-tree.

Under a lighter disguise, the same principle of Love, which we have recognised as the great characteristic of Burns, and of all true poets, occasionally manifests itself in the shape of Humour. Everywhere, indeed, in his sunny moods, a full buoyant flood of mirth rolls through the mind of Burns; he rises to the high, and stoops to the low, and is brother and playmate to all Nature. We speak not of his bold and often irresistible faculty of caricature; for this is Drollery rather than Humour: but a much tenderer sportfulness dwells in him; and comes forth here and there, in evanescent and beautiful touches; as in his *Address to the Mouse*, or the *Farmer's Mare*, or in his *Elegy on poor Mailie*, which last may be reckoned his happiest effort of this kind. In these pieces there are traits of a Humour as fine as that of Sterne; yet altogether different, original, peculiar,—the Humour of Burns.

Of the tenderness, the playful pathos, and many other kindred qualities of Burns's Poetry, much more might be said; but now, with

these poor outlines of a sketch, we must prepare to quit this part of our subject. To speak of his individual Writings, adequately and with any detail, would lead us far beyond our limits. As already hinted, we can look on but few of these pieces as, in strict critical language, deserving the name of Poems: they are rhymed eloquence, rhymed pathos, rhymed sense; yet seldom essentially melodious, aerial, poetical. *Tam o' Shanter* itself, which enjoys so high a favour, does not appear to us, at all decisively, to come under this last category. It is not so much a poem, as a piece of sparkling rhetoric; the heart and body of the story still lies hard and dead. He has not gone back, much less carried us back, into that dark, earnest, wondering age, when the tradition was believed, and when it took its rise; he does not attempt, by any new-modelling of his supernatural ware, to strike anew that deep mysterious chord of human nature, which once responded to such things; and which lives in us too, and will forever live, though silent now, or vibrating with far other notes, and to far different issues. Our German readers will understand us, when we say, that he is not the Tieck but the Musäus of this tale. Externally it is all green and living; yet look closer, it is no firm growth, but only ivy on a rock. The piece does not properly cohere: the strange chasm which yawns in our incredulous imaginations between the Ayr public-house and the gate of Tophet, is nowhere bridged over, nay the idea of such a bridge is laughed at; and thus the Tragedy

of the adventure becomes a mere drunken phantasmagoria, or many-coloured spectrum painted on ale-vapours, and the Farce alone has any reality. We do not say that Burns should have made much more of this tradition; we rather think that, for strictly poetical purposes, not much *was* to be made of it. Neither are we blind to the deep, varied, genial power displayed in what he has actually accomplished; but we find far more "Shakspearean" qualities, as these of *Tam o' Shanter* have been fondly named, in many of his other pieces; nay, we incline to believe, that this latter might have been written, all but quite as well, by a man who, in place of genius, had only possessed talent.

Perhaps we may venture to say, that the most strictly poetical of all his "poems" is one which does not appear in Currie's Edition; but has been often printed before and since, under the humble title of *The Jolly Beggars*. The subject truly is among the lowest in Nature; but it only the more shows our Poet's gift in raising it into the domain of Art. To our minds, this piece seems thoroughly compacted; melted together, refined; and poured forth in one flood of true *liquid* harmony. It is light, airy, soft of movement; yet sharp and precise in its details; every face is a portrait: that *raucle carlin*, that *wee Apollo*, that *Son of Mars*, are Scottish, yet ideal; the scene is at once a dream, and the very Ragcastle of "Poosie-Nansie". Farther, it seems in a considerable degree complete, a real self-supporting Whole, which is the highest merit in a poem.

The blanket of the Night is drawn asunder for a moment; in full, ruddy, flaming light, these rough tatterdemalions are seen in their boisterous revel; for the strong pulse of Life vindicates its right to gladness even here; and when the curtain closes, we prolong the action, without effort; the next day as the last, our *Caird* and our *Balladmonger* are singing and soldering; their "brats and callets" are hawking, begging, cheating; and some other night, in new combinations, they will wring from Fate another hour of wassail and good cheer. Apart from the universal sympathy with man which this again bespeaks in Burns, a genuine inspiration and no inconsiderable technical talent are manifested here. There is the fidelity, humour, warm life and accurate painting and grouping of some Teniers, for whom hostlers and carousing peasants are not without significance. It would be strange, doubtless, to call this the best of Burns's writings: we mean to say only, that it seems to us the most perfect of its kind, as a piece of poetical composition, strictly so called. In the *Beggar's Opera*, in the *Beggar's Bush*, as other critics have already remarked, there is nothing which, in real poetic vigour, equals this *Cantata*; nothing, as we think, which comes within many degrees of it.

But by far the most finished, complete and truly inspired pieces of Burns are, without dispute, to be found among his *Songs*. It is here that, although through a small aperture, his light shines with least obstruction; in its highest beauty, and pure sunny clearness. The

reason may be, that Song is a brief simple species of composition; and requires nothing so much for its perfection, as genuine poetic feeling, genuine music of heart. Yet the Song has its rules equally with the Tragedy; rules which in most cases are poorly fulfilled, in many cases are not so much as felt. We might write a long essay on the Songs of Burns; which we reckon by far the best that Britain has yet produced: for, indeed, since the era of Queen Elizabeth, we know not that, by any other hand, aught truly worth attention has been accomplished in this department. True, we have songs enough "by persons of quality"; we have tawdry, hollow, wine-bred madrigals; many a rhymed speech "in the flowing and watery vein of Ossorius the Portugal Bishop", rich in sonorous words, and, for moral, dashed perhaps with some tint of a sentimental sensuality; all which many persons cease not from endeavouring to sing; though for most part, we fear, the music is but from the throat outwards, or at best from some region far enough short of the *Soul*; not in which, but in a certain inane Limbo of the Fancy, or even in some vaporous debateable-land on the outskirts of the Nervous System, most of such madrigals and rhymed speeches seem to have originated. With the Songs of Burns we must not name these things. Independently of the clear, manly, heartfelt sentiment that ever pervades *his* poetry, his Songs are honest in another point of view: in form, as well as in spirit. They do not *affect* to be set to music, but they

actually and in themselves are music; they have received their life, and fashioned themselves together, in the medium of Harmony, as Venus rose from the bosom of the sea. The story, the feeling, is not detailed, but suggested; not *said*, or spouted, in rhetorical completeness and coherence; but *sung*, in fitful gushes, in glowing hints, in fantastic breaks, in *warblings* not of the voice only, but of the whole mind. We consider this to be the essence of a song; and that no songs since the little careless catches, and, as it were, drops of song, which Shakspeare has here and there sprinkled over his Plays, fulfil this condition in nearly the same degree as most of Burns's do. Such grace and truth of external movement, too, presupposes in general a corresponding force and truth of sentiment and inward meaning. The Songs of Burns are not more perfect in the former quality than in the latter. With what tenderness he sings, yet with what vehemence and entireness! There is a piercing wail in his sorrow, the purest rapture in his joy; he burns with the sternest ire, or laughs with the loudest or sliest mirth; and yet he is sweet and soft, "sweet as the smile when fond lovers meet, and soft as their parting tear!" If we farther take into account the immense variety of his subjects; how, from the loud flowing revel in *Willie brew'd a Peck o' Maut*, to the still, rapt enthusiasm of sadness for *Mary in Heaven*; from the glad kind greeting of *Auld Langsyne*, or the comic archness of *Duncan Gray*, to the fire-eyed fury of *Scots wha hae wi' Wallace bled*, he has found a tone

and words for every mood of man's heart,—it will seem a small praise if we rank him as the first of all our Song-writers; for we know not where to find one worthy of being second to him.

It is on his Songs, as we believe, that Burns's chief influence as an author will ultimately be found to depend: nor, if our Fletcher's aphorism is true, shall we account this a small influence. "Let me make the songs of a people," said he, "and you shall make its laws." Surely, if ever any Poet might have equalled himself with Legislators on this ground, it was Burns. His Songs are already part of the mother-tongue, not of Scotland only but of Britain, and of the millions that in all ends of the earth speak a British language. In hut and hall, as the heart unfolds itself in many-coloured joy and woe of existence, the *name*, the *voice* of that joy and that woe, is the name and voice which Burns has given them. Strictly speaking, perhaps no British man has so deeply affected the thoughts and feelings of so many men, as this solitary and altogether private individual, with means apparently the humblest.

In another point of view, moreover, we incline to think that Burns's influence may have been considerable: we mean, as exerted specially on the Literature of his country, at least on the Literature of Scotland. Among the great changes which British, particularly Scottish literature, has undergone since that period, one of the greatest will be found to consist in its remarkable increase of nationality. Even the

English writers, most popular in Burns's time, were little distinguished for their literary patriotism, in this its best sense. A certain attenuated cosmopolitanism had, in good measure, taken place of the old insular home-feeling; literature was, as it were, without any local environment; was not nourished by the affections which spring from a native soil. Our Grays and Glovers seemed to write almost as if *in vacuo*; the thing written bears no mark of place; it is not written so much for Englishmen, as for men; or rather, which is the inevitable result of this, for certain Generalisations which philosophy termed men. Goldsmith is an exception: not so Johnson; the scene of his *Rambler* is little more English than that of his *Rasselas*. But if such was, in some degree, the case with England, it was, in the highest degree, the case with Scotland. In fact, our Scottish literature had, at that period, a very singular aspect; unexampled, so far as we know, except perhaps at Geneva, where the same state of matters appears still to continue. For a long period after Scotland became British, we had no literature: at the date when Addison and Steele were writing their *Spectators*, our good John Boston was writing, with the noblest intent, but alike in defiance of grammar and philosophy, his *Fourfold State of Man*. Then came the schisms in our National Church, and the fiercer schisms in our Body Politic: Theologic ink, and Jacobite blood, with gall enough in both cases, seemed to have blotted out the intellect of the country; however, it

was only obscured, not obliterated. Lord Kames made nearly the first attempt at writing English; and ere long, Hume, Robertson, Smith, and a whole host of followers, attracted hither the eyes of all Europe. And yet in this brilliant resuscitation of our "fervid genius", there was nothing truly Scottish, nothing indigenous; except, perhaps, the natural impetuosity of intellect, which we sometimes claim, and are sometimes upbraided with, as a characteristic of our nation. It is curious to remark that Scotland, so full of writers, had no Scottish culture, nor indeed any English; our culture was almost exclusively French. It was by studying Racine and Voltaire, Batteux and Boileau, that Kames had trained himself to be a critic and philosopher; it was the light of Montesquieu and Mably that guided Robertson in his political speculations; Quesnay's lamp that kindled the lamp of Adam Smith. Hume was too rich a man to borrow; and perhaps he reacted on the French more than he was acted on by them: but neither had he aught to do with Scotland; Edinburgh, equally with La Flèche, was but the lodging and laboratory, in which he not so much morally *lived*, as metaphysically *investigated*. Never, perhaps, was there a class of writers so clear and well-ordered, yet so totally destitute, to all appearance, of any patriotic affection, nay of any human affection whatever. The French wits of the period were as unpatriotic: but their general deficiency in moral principle, not to say their avowed sensuality and unbelief in

all virtue, strictly so called, render this accountable enough. We hope, there is a patriotism founded on something better than prejudice; that our country may be dear to us, without injury to our philosophy; that in loving and justly prizing all other lands, we may prize justly, and yet love before all others, our own stern Motherland, and the venerable Structure of social and moral Life, which Mind has through long ages been building up for us there. Surely there is nourishment for the better part of man's heart in all this: surely the roots, that have fixed themselves in the very core of man's being, may be so cultivated as to grow up not into briers, but into roses, in the field of his life! Our Scottish sages have no such propensities: the field of their life shows neither briers nor roses; but only a flat, continuous thrashing-floor for Logic, whereon all questions, from the "Doctrine of Rent" to the "Natural History of Religion", are thrashed and sifted with the same mechanical impartiality!

With Sir Walter Scott at the head of our literature, it cannot be denied that much of this evil is past, or rapidly passing away: our chief literary men, whatever other faults they may have, no longer live among us like a French Colony, or some knot of Propaganda Missionaries; but like natural-born subjects of the soil, partaking and sympathising in all our attachments, humours, and habits. Our literature no longer grows in water but in mould, and with the true racy virtues of the soil and climate. How much of this change may be due

to Burns, or to any other individual, it might be difficult to estimate. Direct literary imitation of Burns was not to be looked for. But his example, in the fearless adoption of domestic subjects, could not but operate from afar; and certainly in no heart did the love of country ever burn with a warmer glow than in that of Burns: "a tide of Scottish prejudice", as he modestly calls this deep and generous feeling, "had been poured along his veins; and he felt that it would boil there till the flood-gates shut in eternal rest". It seemed to him, as if *he* could do so little for his country, and yet would so gladly have done all. One small province stood open for him,—that of Scottish Song; and how eagerly he entered on it, how devotedly he laboured there! In his toilsome journeyings, this object never quits him; it is the little happy-valley of his careworn heart. In the gloom of his own affliction, he eagerly searches after some lonely brother of the muse, and rejoices to snatch one other name from the oblivion that was covering it! These were early feelings, and they abode with him to the end:

——A wish (I mind its power),
A wish, that to my latest hour
Will strongly heave my breast,—
That I, for poor auld Scotland's sake,
Some useful plan or book could make,
Or sing a sang at least.
The rough bur Thistle spreading wide
  Amang the bearded bear,
I turn'd my weeding-clips aside,
  And spared the symbol dear.

But to leave the mere literary character of Burns, which has already detained us too long. Far more interesting than any of his written works, as it appears to us, are his acted ones: the Life he willed, and was fated, to lead among his fellow-men. These Poems are but like little rhymed fragments scattered here and there in the grand unrhymed Romance of his earthly existence; and it is only when intercalated in this at their proper places, that they attain their full measure of significance. And this too, alas, was but a fragment! The plan of a mighty edifice had been sketched; some columns, porticos, firm masses of building, stand completed; the rest more or less clearly indicated; with many a far-stretching tendency, which only studious and friendly eyes can now trace towards the purposed termination. For the work is broken off in the middle, almost in the beginning; and rises among us, beautiful and sad, at once unfinished and a ruin! If charitable judgment was necessary in estimating his Poems, and justice required that the aim and the manifest power to fulfil it must often be accepted for the fulfilment; much more is this the case in regard to his Life, the sum and result of all his endeavours, where his difficulties came upon him not in detail only, but in mass; and so much has been left unaccomplished, nay was mistaken, and altogether marred.

Properly speaking, there is but one era in the life of Burns, and that the earliest. We have not youth and manhood, but only youth:

for, to the end, we discern no decisive change in the complexion of his character; in his thirty-seventh year, he is still, as it were, in youth. With all that resoluteness of judgment, that penetrating insight, and singular maturity of intellectual power, exhibited in his writings, he never attains to any clearness regarding himself; to the last, he never ascertains his peculiar aim, even with such distinctness as is common among ordinary men; and therefore never can pursue it with that singleness of will, which insures success and some contentment to such men. To the last, he wavers between two purposes: glorying in his talent, like a true poet, he yet cannot consent to make this his chief and sole glory, and to follow it as the one thing needful, through poverty or riches, through good or evil report. Another far meaner ambition still cleaves to him; he must dream and struggle about a certain "Rock of Independence"; which, natural and even admirable as it might be, was still but a warring with the world, on the comparatively insignificant ground of his being more completely or less completely supplied with money, than others; of his standing at a higher or at a lower altitude in general estimation than others. For the world still appears to him, as to the young, in borrowed colours: he expects from it what it cannot give to any man; seeks for contentment, not within himself, in action and wise effort, but from without, in the kindness of circumstances, in love, friendship, honour, pecuniary ease. He would be happy,

not actively and in himself, but passively and from some ideal cornucopia of Enjoyments, not earned by his own labour, but showered on him by the beneficence of Destiny. Thus, like a young man, he cannot gird himself up for any worthy well-calculated goal, but swerves to and fro, between passionate hope and remorseful disappointment: rushing onwards with a deep tempestuous force, he surmounts or breaks asunder many a barrier; travels, nay advances far, but advancing only under uncertain guidance, is ever and anon turned from his path; and to the last, cannot reach the only true happiness of a man, that of clear decided Activity in the sphere for which, by nature and circumstances, he has been fitted and appointed.

We do not say these things in dispraise of Burns; nay, perhaps, they but interest us the more in his favour. This blessing is not given soonest to the best; but rather, it is often the greatest minds that are latest in obtaining it; for where most is to be developed, most time may be required to develop it. A complex condition had been assigned him from without; as complex a condition from within: no "pre-established harmony" existed between the clay soil of Mossgiel and the empyrean soul of Robert Burns; it was not wonderful that the adjustment between them should have been long postponed, and his arm long cumbered, and his sight confused, in so vast and discordant an economy as he had been appointed steward over. Byron was, at his death, but

a year younger than Burns; and through life, as it might have appeared, far more simply situated: yet in him too, we can trace no such adjustment, no such moral manhood; but at best, and only a little before his end, the beginning of what seemed such.

By much the most striking incident in Burns's Life is his journey to Edinburgh; but perhaps a still more important one is his residence at Irvine, so early as in his twenty-third year. Hitherto his life had been poor and toilworn; but otherwise not ungenial, and, with all its distresses, by no means unhappy. In his parentage, deducting outward circumstances, he had every reason to reckon himself fortunate. His father was a man of thoughtful, intense, earnest character, as the best of our peasants are; valuing knowledge, possessing some, and, what is far better and rarer, open-minded for more: a man with a keen insight and devout heart; reverent towards God, friendly therefore at once, and fearless towards all that God has made: in one word, though but a hard-handed peasant, a complete and fully unfolded *Man*. Such a father is seldom found in any rank in society; and was worth descending far in society to seek. Unfortunately, he was very poor; had he been even a little richer, almost never so little, the whole might have issued far otherwise. Mighty events turn on a straw; the crossing of a brook decides the conquest of the world. Had this William Burns's small seven acres of nursery-ground anywise prospered, the boy Robert had

been sent to school; had struggled forward, as so many weaker men do, to some university; come forth not as a rustic wonder, but as a regular well-trained intellectual workman, and changed the whole course of British Literature, —for it lay in him to have done this! But the nursery did not prosper; poverty sank his whole family below the help of even our cheap school-system: Burns remained a hard-worked ploughboy, and British literature took its own course. Nevertheless, even in this rugged scene there is much to nourish him. If he drudges, it is with his brother, and for his father and mother, whom he loves, and would fain shield from want. Wisdom is not banished from their poor hearth, nor the balm of natural feeling: the solemn words, *Let us worship God*, are heard there from a "priest-like father"; if threatenings of unjust men throw mother and children into tears, these are tears not of grief only, but of holiest affection; every heart in that humble group feels itself the closer knit to every other; in their hard warfare they are there together, a "little band of brethren". Neither are such tears, and the deep beauty that dwells in them, their only portion. Light visits the hearts as it does the eyes of all living: there is a force, too, in this youth, that enables him to trample on misfortune; nay, to bind it under his feet to make him sport. For a bold, warm, buoyant humour of character has been given him; and so the thick-coming shapes of evil are welcomed with a gay, friendly irony, and in their closest pressure he bates

no jot of heart or hope. Vague yearnings of ambition fail not, as he grows up; dreamy fancies hang like cloud-cities around him; the curtain of Existence is slowly rising, in many-coloured splendour and gloom: and the auroral light of first love is gilding his horizon, and the music of song is on his path; and so he walks

——in glory and in joy,
Behind his plough, upon the mountain side!

We ourselves know, from the best evidence, that up to this date Burns was happy; nay, that he was the gayest, brightest, most fantastic, fascinating being to be found in the world; more so even than he ever afterwards appeared. But now, at this early age, he quits the paternal roof; goes forth into looser, louder, more exciting society; and becomes initiated in those dissipations, those vices, which a certain class of philosophers have asserted to be a natural preparative for entering on active life; a kind of mud-bath, in which the youth is, as it were, necessitated to steep, and, we suppose, cleanse himself, before the real toga of Manhood can be laid on him. We shall not dispute much with this class of philosophers; we hope they are mistaken: for Sin and Remorse so easily beset us at all stages of life, and are always such indifferent company, that it seems hard we should, at any stage, be forced and fated not only to meet, but to yield to them, and even serve for a term in their leprous armada. We hope it is not so. Clear we are, at all

events, it cannot be the training one receives in this Devil's-service, but only our determining to desert from it, that fits us for true manly Action. We become men, not after we have been dissipated, and disappointed in the chase of false pleasure; but after we have ascertained, in any way, what impassable barriers hem us in through this life; how mad it is to hope for contentment to our infinite soul from the *gifts* of this extremely finite world; that a man must be sufficient for himself; and that for suffering and enduring there is no remedy but striving and doing. Manhood begins when we have in any way made truce with Necessity; begins even when we have surrendered to Necessity, as the most part only do; but begins joyfully and hopefully only when we have reconciled ourselves to Necessity; and thus, in reality, triumphed over it, and felt that in Necessity we are free. Surely, such lessons as this last, which, in one shape or other, is the grand lesson for every mortal man, are better learned from the lips of a devout mother, in the looks and actions of a devout father, while the heart is yet soft and pliant, than in collision with the sharp adamant of Fate, attracting us to shipwreck us, when the heart is grown hard, and may be broken before it will become contrite! Had Burns continued to learn this, as he was already learning it, in his father's cottage, he would have learned it fully, which he never did; and been saved many a lasting aberration, many a bitter hour and year of remorseful sorrow.

It seems to us another circumstance of fatal import in Burns's history, that at this time too he became involved in the religious quarrels of his district; that he was enlisted and feasted, as the fighting man of the New-Light Priesthood, in their highly unprofitable warfare. At the tables of these free-minded clergy, he learned much more than was needful for him. Such liberal ridicule of fanaticism awakened in his mind scruples about Religion itself; and a whole world of Doubts, which it required quite another set of conjurors than these men to exorcise. We do not say that such an intellect as his could have escaped similar doubts, at some period of his history; or even that he could, at a later period, have come through them altogether victorious and unharmed: but it seems peculiarly unfortunate that this time, above all others, should have been fixed for the encounter. For now, with principles assailed by evil example from without, by "passions raging like demons" from within, he had little need of sceptical misgivings to whisper treason in the heat of the battle, or to cut off his retreat if he were already defeated. He loses his feeling of innocence; his mind is at variance with itself; the old divinity no longer presides there; but wild Desires and wild Repentance alternately oppress him. Ere long, too, he has committed himself before the world; his character for sobriety, dear to a Scottish peasant as few corrupted worldlings can even conceive, is destroyed in the eyes of men; and his only refuge consists in trying to disbelieve his guilti-

ness, and is but a refuge of lies. The blackest desperation now gathers over him, broken only by red lightnings of remorse. The whole fabric of his life is blasted asunder; for now not only his character, but his personal liberty, is to be lost; men and Fortune are leagued for his hurt; "hungry Ruin has him in the wind". He sees no escape but the saddest of all: exile from his loved country, to a country in every sense inhospitable and abhorrent to him. While the "gloomy night is gathering fast", in mental storm and solitude, as well as in physical, he sings his wild farewell to Scotland:

> Farewell my friends, farewell my foes!
> My peace with these, my love with those:
> The bursting tears my heart declare;
> Adieu, my native banks of Ayr!

Light breaks suddenly in on him in floods; but still a false transitory light, and no real sunshine. He is invited to Edinburgh; hastens thither with anticipating heart; is welcomed as in a triumph, and with universal blandishment and acclamation; whatever is wisest, whatever is greatest or loveliest there, gathers round him, to gaze on his face, to show him honour, sympathy, affection. Burns's appearance among the sages and nobles of Edinburgh must be regarded as one of the most singular phenomena in modern Literature; almost like the appearance of some Napoleon among the crowned sovereigns of modern Politics. For it is nowise as "a mockery king", set there by

favour, transiently and for a purpose, that he will let himself be treated; still less is he a mad Rienzi, whose sudden elevation turns his too weak head: but he stands there on his own basis; cool, unastonished, holding his equal rank from Nature herself; putting forth no claim which there is not strength *in* him, as well as about him, to vindicate. Mr. Lockhart has some forcible observations on this point:

"It needs no effort of imagination", says he, "to conceive what the sensations of an isolated set of scholars (almost all either clergymen or professors) must have been, in the presence of this big-boned, black-browed, brawny stranger, with his great flashing eyes, who, having forced his way among them from the plough-tail at a single stride, manifested in the whole strain of his bearing and conversation a most thorough conviction, that in the society of the most eminent men of his nation, he was exactly where he was entitled to be; hardly deigned to flatter them by exhibiting even an occasional symptom of being flattered by their notice; by turns calmly measured himself against the most cultivated understandings of his time in discussion; overpowered the *bon mots* of the most celebrated convivialists by broad floods of merriment, impregnated with all the burning life of genius; astounded bosoms habitually enveloped in the thrice-piled folds of social reserve, by compelling them to tremble,—nay, to tremble visibly,—beneath the fearless touch of natural pathos; and all this without indicating the smallest willingness to be ranked among those professional ministers of excitement, who are content to be paid in money and smiles for doing what the spectators and auditors would be ashamed of doing in their own persons, even if they had the power of doing it; and

last, and probably worst of all, who was known to be in the habit of enlivening societies which they would have scorned to approach, still more frequently than their own, with eloquence no less magnificent; with wit, in all likelihood still more daring; often enough, as the superiors whom he fronted without alarm might have guessed from the beginning, and had ere long no occasion to guess, with wit pointed at themselves."

The farther we remove from this scene, the more singular will it seem to us: details of the exterior aspect of it are already full of interest. Most readers recollect Mr. Walker's personal interviews with Burns as among the best passages of his Narrative: a time will come when this reminiscence of Sir Walter Scott's, slight though it is, will also be precious:

"As for Burns," writes Sir Walter, "I may truly say, *Virgilium vidi tantùm.* I was a lad of fifteen in 1786–7, when he came first to Edinburgh, but had sense and feeling enough to be much interested in his poetry, and would have given the world to know him: but I had very little acquaintance with any literary people, and still less with the gentry of the west country, the two sets that he most frequented. Mr. Thomas Grierson was at that time a clerk of my father's. He knew Burns, and promised to ask him to his lodgings to dinner; but had no opportunity to keep his word; otherwise I might have seen more of this distinguished man. As it was, I saw him one day at the late venerable Professor Ferguson's, where there were several gentlemen of literary reputation, among whom I remember the celebrated Mr. Dugald Stewart. Of course, we youngsters sat silent, looked and listened.

The only thing I remember which was remarkable in Burns's manner, was the effect produced upon him by a print of Bunbury's, representing a soldier lying dead on the snow, his dog sitting in misery on one side,—on the other, his widow, with a child in her arms. These lines were written beneath:

'Cold on Canadian hills, or Minden's plain,
Perhaps that mother wept her soldier slain;
Bent o'er her babe, her eye dissolved in dew,
The big drops mingling with the milk he drew,
Gave the sad presage of his future years,
The child of misery baptised in tears'.

"Burns seemed much affected by the print, or rather by the ideas which it suggested to his mind. He actually shed tears. He asked whose the lines were; and it chanced that nobody but myself remembered that they occur in a half-forgotten poem of Langhorne's called by the unpromising title of 'The Justice of Peace'. I whispered my information to a friend present; he mentioned it to Burns, who rewarded me with a look and a word, which, though of mere civility, I then received and still recollect with very great pleasure.

"His person was strong and robust; his manners rustic, not clownish; a sort of dignified plainness and simplicity, which received part of its effect perhaps from one's knowledge of his extraordinary talents. His features are represented in Mr. Nasmyth's picture: but to me it conveys the idea that they are diminished, as if seen in perspective. I think his countenance was more massive than it looks in any of the portraits. I should have taken the poet, had I not known what he was, for a very sagacious country farmer of the old Scotch school, *i.e.* none of your modern agriculturists who keep labourers for their drudgery, but the *douce gudeman* who held his own plough. There was a strong

expression of sense and shrewdness in all his lineaments; the eye alone, I think, indicated the poetical character and temperament. It was large, and of a dark cast, which glowed (I say literally *glowed*) when he spoke with feeling or interest. I never saw such another eye in a human head, though I have seen the most distinguished men of my time. His conversation expressed perfect self-confidence, without the slightest presumption. Among the men who were the most learned of their time and country, he expressed himself with perfect firmness, but without the least intrusive forwardness; and when he differed in opinion, he did not hesitate to express it firmly, yet at the same time with modesty. I do not remember any part of his conversation distinctly enough to be quoted; nor did I ever see him again, except in the street, where he did not recognise me, as I could not expect he should. He was much caressed in Edinburgh: but (considering what literary emoluments have been since his day) the efforts made for his relief were extremely trifling.

"I remember, on this occasion I mention, I thought Burns's acquaintance with English poetry was rather limited; and also that, having twenty times the abilities of Allan Ramsay and of Fergusson, he talked of them with too much humility as his models: there was doubtless national predilection in his estimate.

"This is all I can tell you about Burns. I have only to add, that his dress corresponded with his manner. He was like a farmer dressed in his best to dine with the laird. I do not speak *in malam partem*, when I say, I never saw a man in company with his superiors in station or information more perfectly free from either the reality or the affectation of embarrassment. I was told, but did not observe it, that his address to females was extremely deferential, and always with a turn either to the

pathetic or humorous, which engaged their attention particularly. I have heard the late Duchess of Gordon remark this.—I do not know anything I can add to these recollections of forty years since."

The conduct of Burns under this dazzling blaze of favour; the calm, unaffected, manly manner in which he not only bore it, but estimated its value, has justly been regarded as the best proof that could be given of his real vigour and integrity of mind. A little natural vanity, some touches of hypocritical modesty, some glimmerings of affectation, at least some fear of being thought affected, we could have pardoned in almost any man; but no such indication is to be traced here. In his unexampled situation the young peasant is not a moment perplexed; so many strange lights do not confuse him, do not lead him astray. Nevertheless, we cannot but perceive that this winter did him great and lasting injury. A somewhat clearer knowledge of men's affairs, scarcely of their characters, it did afford him; but a sharper feeling of Fortune's unequal arrangements in their social destiny it also left with him. He had seen the gay and gorgeous arena, in which the powerful are born to play their parts; nay had himself stood in the midst of it; and he felt more bitterly than ever, that here he was but a looker-on, and had no part or lot in that splendid game. From this time a jealous indignant fear of social degradation takes possession of him; and perverts, so far as aught could pervert, his private contentment,

and his feelings towards his richer fellows. It was clear to Burns that he had talent enough to make a fortune, or a hundred fortunes, could he but have rightly willed this; it was clear also that he willed something far different, and therefore could not make one. Unhappy it was that he had not power to choose the one, and reject the other; but must halt forever between two opinions, two objects; making hampered advancement towards either. But so is it with many men: we "long for the merchandise, yet would fain keep the price"; and so stand chaffering with Fate, in vexatious altercation, till the night come, and our fair is over!

The Edinburgh Learned of that period were in general more noted for clearness of head than for warmth of heart: with the exception of the good old Blacklock, whose help was too ineffectual, scarcely one among them seems to have looked at Burns with any true sympathy, or indeed much otherwise than as a highly curious *thing*. By the great also he is treated in the customary fashion; entertained at their tables and dismissed: certain modica of pudding and praise are, from time to time, gladly exchanged for the fascination of his presence; which exchange once effected, the bargain is finished, and each party goes his several way. At the end of this strange season, Burns gloomily sums up his gains and losses, and meditates on the chaotic future. In money he is somewhat richer; in fame and the show of happiness, infinitely richer; but in the

substance of it, as poor as ever. Nay poorer; for his heart is now maddened still more with the fever of worldly Ambition; and through long years the disease will rack him with unprofitable sufferings, and weaken his strength for all true and nobler aims.

What Burns was next to do or to avoid; how a man so circumstanced was now to guide himself towards his true advantage, might at this point of time have been a question for the wisest. It was a question too, which apparently he was left altogether to answer for himself: of his learned or rich patrons it had not struck any individual to turn a thought on this so trivial matter. Without claiming for Burns the praise of perfect sagacity, we must say, that his Excise and Farm scheme does not seem to us a very unreasonable one; that we should be at a loss, even now, to suggest one decidedly better. Certain of his admirers have felt scandalised at his ever resolving to *gauge*; and would have had him lie at the pool, till the spirit of Patronage stirred the waters, that so, with one friendly plunge, all his sorrows might be healed. Unwise counsellors! They know not the manner of this spirit; and how, in the lap of most golden dreams, a man might have happiness, were it not that in the interim he must die of hunger! It reflects credit on the manliness and sound sense of Burns, that he felt so early on what ground he was standing; and preferred self-help, on the humblest scale, to dependence and inaction, though with hope of far more splendid possibilities. But

even these possibilities were not rejected in his scheme: he might expect, if it chanced that he *had* any friend, to rise, in no long period, into something even like opulence and leisure; while again, if it chanced that he had no friend, he could still live in security; and for the rest, he "did not intend to borrow honour from any profession". We reckon that his plan was honest and well-calculated: all turned on the execution of it. Doubtless it failed; yet not, we believe, from any vice inherent in itself. Nay, after all, it was no failure of external means, but of internal, that overtook Burns. His was no bankruptcy of the purse, but of the soul; to his last day, he owed no man anything.

Meanwhile he begins well: with two good and wise actions. His donation to his mother, munificent from a man whose income had lately been seven pounds a year, was worthy of him, and not more than worthy. Generous also, and worthy of him, was the treatment of the woman whose life's welfare now depended on his pleasure. A friendly observer might have hoped serene days for him: his mind is on the true road to peace with itself: what clearness he still wants will be given as he proceeds; for the best teacher of duties, that still lie dim to us, is the Practice of those we see, and have at hand. Had the "patrons of genius", who could give him nothing, but taken nothing from him, at least nothing more! The wounds of his heart would have healed, vulgar ambition would have died away. Toil

and Frugality would have been welcome, since Virtue dwelt with them; and Poetry would have shone through them as of old: and in her clear ethereal light, which was his own by birthright, he might have looked down on his earthly destiny, and all its obstructions, not with patience only, but with love.

But the patrons of genius would not have it so. Picturesque tourists, all manner of fashionable danglers after literature, and, far worse, all manner of convivial Mæcenases, hovered round him in his retreat; and his good as well as his weak qualities secured them influence over him. He was flattered by their notice; and his warm social nature made it impossible for him to shake them off, and hold on his way apart from them. These men, as we believe, were proximately the means of his ruin. Not that they meant him any ill; they only meant themselves a little good; if he suffered harm, let *him* look to it! But they wasted his precious time and his precious talent; they disturbed his composure, broke down his returning habits of temperance and assiduous contented exertion. Their pampering was baneful to him; their cruelty, which soon followed, was equally baneful. The old grudge against Fortune's inequality awoke with new bitterness in their neighbourhood; and Burns had no retreat but to the "Rock of Independence", which is but an air-castle, after all, that looks well at a distance, but will screen no one from real wind and wet. Flushed with irregular excitement, exasperated alternately by con-

tempt of others, and contempt of himself, Burns was no longer regaining his peace of mind, but fast losing it forever. There was a hollowness at the heart of his life, for his conscience did not now approve what he was doing.

Amid the vapours of unwise enjoyment, of bootless remorse, and angry discontent with Fate, his true loadstar, a life of Poetry, with Poverty, nay with Famine if it must be so, was too often altogether hidden from his eyes. And yet he sailed a sea, where without some such loadstar there was no right steering. Meteors of French Politics rise before him, but these were not *his* stars. An accident this, which hastened, but did not originate, his worst distresses. In the mad contentions of that time, he comes in collision with certain official Superiors; is wounded by them; cruelly lacerated, we should say, could a dead mechanical implement, in any case, be called cruel: and shrinks, in indignant pain, into deeper self-seclusion, into gloomier moodiness than ever. His life has now lost its unity: it is a life of fragments; led with little aim, beyond the melancholy one of securing its own continuance,—in fits of wild false joy when such offered, and of black despondency when they passed away. His character before the world begins to suffer: calumny is busy with him; for a miserable man makes more enemies than friends. Some faults he has fallen into, and a thousand misfortunes; but deep criminality is what he stands accused of, and they that are *not* without sin cast the first stone at him! For

is he not a well-wisher of the French Revolution, a Jacobin, and therefore in that one act guilty of all? These accusations, political and moral, it has since appeared, were false enough: but the world hesitated little to credit them. Nay, his convivial Mæcenases themselves were not the last to do it. There is reason to believe that, in his later years, the Dumfries Aristocracy had partly withdrawn themselves from Burns, as from a tainted person, no longer worthy of their acquaintance. That painful class, stationed, in all provincial cities, behind the outmost breastwork of Gentility, there to stand siege and do battle against the intrusions of Grocerdom and Grazierdom, had actually seen dishonour in the society of Burns, and branded him with their veto; had, as we vulgarly say, *cut* him! We find one passage in this Work of Mr. Lockhart's, which will not out of our thoughts:

"A gentleman of that county, whose name I have already more than once had occasion to refer to, has often told me that he was seldom more grieved, than when riding into Dumfries one fine summer evening about this time to attend a county ball, he saw Burns walking alone, on the shady side of the principal street of the town, while the opposite side was gay with successive groups of gentlemen and ladies, all drawn together for the festivities of the night, not one of whom appeared willing to recognise him. The horseman dismounted, and joined Burns, who on his proposing to cross the street said: 'Nay, nay, my young friend, that's all over now'; and quoted, after a pause, some verses of Lady Grizzel Baillie's pathetic ballad:

'His bonnet stood ance fu' fair on his brow,
His auld ane look'd better than mony ane's new;
But now he lets 't wear ony way it will hing,
And casts himsell dowie upon the corn-bing.

'O were we young, as we ance hae been,
We sud hae been galloping down on yon green,
And linking it ower the lily-white lea!
And werena my heart light, I wad die.'

It was little in Burns's character to let his feelings on certain subjects escape in this fashion. He, immediately after reciting these verses, assumed the sprightliness of his most pleasing manner; and taking his young friend home with him, entertained him very agreeably till the hour of the ball arrived."

Alas! when we think that Burns now sleeps "where bitter indignation can no longer lacerate his heart", and that most of those fair dames and frizzled gentlemen already lie at his side, where the breastwork of gentility is quite thrown down,—who would not sigh over the thin delusions and foolish toys that divide heart from heart, and make man unmerciful to his brother!

It was not now to be hoped that the genius of Burns would ever reach maturity, or accomplish aught worthy of itself. His spirit was jarred in its melody; not the soft breath of natural feeling, but the rude hand of Fate, was now sweeping over the strings. And yet what harmony was in him, what music even in his discords! How the wild tones had a charm for the simplest and the wisest; and all

men felt and knew that here also was one of the Gifted! "If he entered an inn at midnight, after all the inmates were in bed, the news of his arrival circulated from the cellar to the garret; and ere ten minutes had elapsed, the landlord and all his guests were assembled!" Some brief pure moments of poetic life were yet appointed him, in the composition of his Songs. We can understand how he grasped at this employment; and how too, he spurned all other reward for it but what the labour itself brought him. For the soul of Burns, though scathed and marred, was yet living in its full moral strength, though sharply conscious of its errors and abasement: and here, in his destitution and degradation, was one act of seeming nobleness and self-devotedness left even for him to perform. He felt too, that with all the "thoughtless follies" that had "laid him low", the world was unjust and cruel to him; and he silently appealed to another and calmer time. Not as a hired soldier, but as a patriot, would he strive for the glory of his country: so he cast from him the poor sixpence a-day, and served zealously as a volunteer. Let us not grudge him this last luxury of his existence; let him not have appealed to us in vain! The money was not necessary to him; he struggled through without it: long since, these guineas would have been gone, and now the high-mindedness of refusing them will plead for him in all hearts for ever.

We are here arrived at the crisis of Burns's life; for matters had now taken such a shape

with him as could not long continue. If improvement was not to be looked for, Nature could only for a limited time maintain this dark and maddening warfare against the world and itself. We are not medically informed whether any continuance of years was, at this period, probable for Burns; whether his death is to be looked on as in some sense an accidental event, or only as the natural consequence of the long series of events that had preceded. The latter seems to be the likelier opinion; and yet it is by no means a certain one. At all events, as we have said, *some* change could not be very distant. Three gates of deliverance, it seems to us, were open for Burns: clear poetical activity; madness; or death. The first, with longer life, was still possible, though not probable; for physical causes were beginning to be concerned in it: and yet Burns had an iron resolution; could he but have seen and felt, that not only his highest glory, but his first duty, and the true medicine for all his woes, lay here. The second was still less probable; for his mind was ever among the clearest and firmest. So the milder third gate was opened for him: and he passed, not softly, yet speedily, into that still country, where the hail-storms and fire-showers do not reach, and the heaviest-laden wayfarer at length lays down his load!

Contemplating this sad end of Burns, and how he sank unaided by any real help, uncheered by any wise sympathy, generous minds have sometimes figured to themselves, with a

reproachful sorrow, that much might have been done for him; that by counsel, true affection and friendly ministrations, he might have been saved to himself and the world. We question whether there is not more tenderness of heart than soundness of judgment in these suggestions. It seems dubious to us whether the richest, wisest, most benevolent individual could have lent Burns any effectual help. Counsel, which seldom profits any one, he did not need; in his understanding, he knew the right from the wrong, as well perhaps as any man ever did; but the persuasion, which would have availed him, lies not so much in the head as in the heart, where no argument or expostulation could have assisted much to implant it. As to money again, we do not believe that this was his essential want; or well see how any private man could, even presupposing Burns's consent, have bestowed on him an independent fortune, with much prospect of decisive advantage. It is a mortifying truth, that two men in any rank of society, could hardly be found virtuous enough to give money, and to take it as a necessary gift, without injury to the moral entireness of one or both. But so stands the fact: Friendship, in the old heroic sense of that term, no longer exists; except in the cases of kindred or other legal affinity, it is in reality no longer expected, or recognised as a virtue among men. A close observer of manners has pronounced "Patronage", that is, pecuniary or other economic furtherance, to be "twice cursed": cursing him that gives, and

him that takes! And thus, in regard to outward matters also, it has become the rule, as in regard to inward it always was and must be the rule, that no one shall look for effectual help to another; but that each shall rest contented with what help he can afford himself. Such, we say, is the principle of modern Honour; naturally enough growing out of that sentiment of Pride, which we inculcate and encourage as the basis of our whole social morality. Many a poet has been poorer than Burns; but no one was ever prouder: we may question whether, without great precautions, even a pension from Royalty would not have galled and encumbered, more than actually assisted him.

Still less, therefore, are we disposed to join with another class of Burns's admirers, who accuse the higher ranks among us of having ruined Burns by their selfish neglect of him. We have already stated our doubts whether direct pecuniary help, had it been offered, would have been accepted, or could have proved very effectual. We shall readily admit, however, that much was to be done for Burns; that many a poisoned arrow might have been warded from his bosom; many an entanglement in his path cut asunder by the hand of the powerful; and light and heat, shed on him from high places, would have made his humble atmosphere more genial; and the softest heart then breathing might have lived and died with some fewer pangs. Nay, we shall grant farther, and for Burns it is granting much,

that, with all his pride, he would have thanked, even with exaggerated gratitude, any one who had cordially befriended him: patronage, unless once cursed, needed not to have been twice so. At all events, the poor promotion he desired in his calling might have been granted: it was his own scheme, therefore likelier than any other to be of service. All this it might have been a luxury, nay it was a duty, for our nobility to have done. No part of all this, however, did any of them do; or apparently attempt, or wish to do: so much is granted against them. But what then is the amount of their blame? Simply that they were men of the world, and walked by the principles of such men; that they treated Burns, as other nobles and other commoners had done other poets; as the English did Shakspeare; as King Charles and his Cavaliers did Butler, as King Philip and his Grandees did Cervantes. Do men gather grapes of thorns; or shall we cut down our thorns for yielding only a *fence* and haws? How, indeed, could the "nobility and gentry of his native land" hold out any help to this "Scottish Bard, proud of his name and country"? Were the nobility and gentry so much as able rightly to help themselves? Had they not their game to preserve; their borough interests to strengthen; dinners, therefore, of various kinds to eat and give? Were their means more than adequate to all this business, or less than adequate? Less than adequate in general; few of them in reality were richer than Burns; many of them were poorer; for some-

times they had to wring their supplies, as with thumbscrews, from the hard hand; and, in their need of guineas, to forget their duty of mercy; which Burns was never reduced to do. Let us pity and forgive them. The game they preserved and shot, the dinners they ate and gave, the borough interests they strengthened, the *little* Babylons they severally builded by the glory of their might, are all melted or melting back into the primeval Chaos, as man's merely selfish endeavours are fated to do: and here was an action, extending, in virtue of its worldly influence, we may say, through all time; in virtue of its moral nature, beyond all time, being immortal as the Spirit of Goodness itself; this action was offered them to do, and light was not given them to do it. Let us pity and forgive them. But better than pity, let us go and *do otherwise*. Human suffering did not end with the life of Burns; neither was the solemn mandate, "Love one another, bear one another's burdens", given to the rich only, but to all men. True, we shall find no Burns to relieve, to assuage by our aid or our pity; but celestial natures, groaning under the fardels of a weary life, we shall still find; and that wretchedness which Fate has rendered *voiceless* and *tuneless* is not the least wretched, but the most.

Still, we do not think that the blame of Burns's failure lies chiefly with the world. The world, it seems to us, treated him with more, rather than with less kindness than it usually shows to such men. It has ever, we fear, shown but small favour to its Teachers:

hunger and nakedness, perils and reviling, the prison, the cross, the poison-chalice have, in most times and countries, been the market-price it has offered for Wisdom, the welcome with which it has greeted those who have come to enlighten and purify it. Homer and Socrates, and the Christian Apostles, belong to old days; but the world's Martyrology was not completed with these. Roger Bacon and Galileo languish in priestly dungeons; Tasso pines in the cell of a madhouse; Camoens dies begging on the streets of Lisbon. So neglected, so "persecuted they the Prophets", not in Judea only, but in all places where men have been. We reckon that every poet of Burns's order is, or should be, a prophet and teacher to his age; that he has no right to expect great kindness from it, but rather is bound to do it great kindness; that Burns, in particular, experienced fully the usual proportion of the world's goodness; and that the blame of his failure, as we have said, lies not chiefly with the world.

Where then does it lie? We are forced to answer: With himself; it is his inward, not his outward misfortunes that bring him to the dust. Seldom, indeed, is it otherwise; seldom is a life morally wrecked but the grand cause lies in some internal malarrangement, some want less of good fortune than of good guidance. Nature fashions no creature without implanting in it the strength needful for its action and duration; least of all does she so neglect her masterpiece and darling, the poetic soul. Neither can we believe that it is in the power

of *any* external circumstances utterly to ruin the mind of a man; nay, if proper wisdom be given him, even so much as to affect its essential health and beauty. The sternest sum-total of all worldly misfortunes is Death; nothing more *can* lie in the cup of human woe: yet many men, in all ages, have triumphed over Death, and led it captive; converting its physical victory into a moral victory for themselves, into a seal and immortal consecration for all that their past life had achieved. What has been done, may be done again: nay, it is but the degree and not the kind of such heroism that differs in different seasons; for without some portion of this spirit, not of boisterous daring, but of silent fearlessness, of Self-denial in all its forms, no good man, in any scene or time, has ever attained to be good.

We have already stated the error of Burns; and mourned over it, rather than blamed it. It was the want of unity in his purposes, of consistency in his aims; the hapless attempt to mingle in friendly union the common spirit of the world with the spirit of poetry, which is of a far different and altogether irreconcilable nature. Burns was nothing wholly; and Burns could be nothing, no man formed as he was can be anything, by halves. The heart, not of a mere hot-blooded, popular Versemonger, or poetical *Restaurateur*, but of a true Poet and Singer, worthy of the old religious heroic times, had been given him: and he fell in an age, not of heroism and religion, but of scepticism, selfishness and triviality, when true

Nobleness was little understood, and its place supplied by a hollow, dissocial, altogether barren and unfruitful principle of Pride. The influences of that age, his open, kind, susceptible nature, to say nothing of his highly untoward situation, made it more than usually difficult for him to cast aside, or rightly subordinate; the better spirit that was within him ever sternly demanded its rights, its supremacy: he spent his life in endeavouring to reconcile these two; and lost it, as he must lose it, without reconciling them.

Burns was born poor; and born also to continue poor, for he would not endeavour to be otherwise: this it had been well could he have once for all admitted, and considered as finally settled. He was poor, truly; but hundreds even of his own class and order of minds have been poorer, yet have suffered nothing deadly from it: nay, his own Father had a far sorer battle with ungrateful destiny than his was; and he did not yield to it, but died courageously warring, and to all moral intents prevailing, against it. True, Burns had little means, had even little time for poetry, his only real pursuit and vocation; but so much the more precious was what little he had. In all these external respects his case was hard; but very far from the hardest. Poverty, incessant drudgery and much worse evils, it has often been the lot of Poets and wise men to strive with, and their glory to conquer. Locke was banished as a traitor; and wrote his *Essay on the Human Understanding* sheltering himself in a

Dutch garret. Was Milton rich or at his ease when he composed *Paradise Lost*? Not only low, but fallen from a height; not only poor, but impoverished; in darkness and with dangers compassed round, he sang his immortal song, and found fit audience, though few. Did not Cervantes finish his work, a maimed soldier and in prison? Nay, was not the *Araucana*, which Spain acknowledges as its Epic, written without even the aid of paper; on scraps of leather, as the stout fighter and voyager snatched any moment from that wild warfare?

And what then had these men, which Burns wanted? Two things; both which, it seems to us, are indispensable for such men. They had a true, religious principle of morals; and a single not a double aim in their activity. They were not self-seekers and self-worshippers; but seekers and worshippers of something far better than Self. Not personal enjoyment was their object; but a high, heroic idea of Religion, of Patriotism, of heavenly Wisdom in one or the other form, ever hovered before them; in which cause, they neither shrank from suffering, nor called on the earth to witness it as something wonderful; but patiently endured, counting it blessedness enough so to spend and be spent. Thus the "golden calf of Self-love", however curiously carved, was not their Deity; but the Invisible Goodness, which alone is man's reasonable service. This feeling was as a celestial fountain, whose streams refreshed into gladness and beauty all the provinces of their otherwise too desolate existence. In a

word, they willed one thing, to which all other things were subordinated and made subservient; and therefore they accomplished it. The wedge will rend rocks; but its edge must be sharp and single: if it be double, the wedge is bruised in pieces and will rend nothing.

Part of this superiority these men owed to their age; in which heroism and devotedness were still practised, or at least not yet disbelieved in: but much of it likewise they owed to themselves. With Burns again it was different. His morality, in most of its practical points, is that of a mere worldly man; enjoyment, in a finer or coarser shape, is the only thing he longs and strives for. A noble instinct sometimes raises him above this; but an instinct only, and acting only for moments. He has no Religion; in the shallow age, where his days were cast, Religion was not discriminated from the New and Old Light *forms* of Religion; and was, with these, becoming obsolete in the minds of men. His heart, indeed, is alive with a trembling adoration, but there is no temple in his understanding. He lives in darkness and in the shadow of doubt. His religion, at best, is an anxious wish; like that of Rabelais, "a great Perhaps".

He loved Poetry warmly, and in his heart; could he but have loved it purely, and with his whole undivided heart, it had been well. For Poetry, as Burns could have followed it, is but another form of Wisdom, of Religion; is itself Wisdom and Religion. But this also was denied him. His poetry is a stray vagrant

gleam, which will not be extinguished within him, yet rises not to be the true light of his path, but is often a wildfire that misleads him. It was not necessary for Burns to be rich, to be, or to seem "independent"; but it *was* necessary for him to be at one with his own heart; to place what was highest in his nature highest also in his life; "to seek within himself for that consistency and sequence, which external events would for ever refuse him". He was born a poet; poetry was the celestial element of his being, and should have been the soul of his whole endeavours. Lifted into that serene ether, whither he had wings given him to mount, he would have needed no other elevation: poverty, neglect and all evil, save the desecration of himself and his Art, were a small matter to him; the pride and the passions of the world lay far beneath his feet; and he looked down alike on noble and slave, on prince and beggar, and all that wore the stamp of man, with clear recognition, with brotherly affection, with sympathy, with pity. Nay, we question whether for his culture as a Poet, poverty and much suffering for a season were not absolutely advantageous. Great men, in looking back over their lives, have testified to that effect. "I would not for much", says Jean Paul, "that I had been born richer." And yet Paul's birth was poor enough; for, in another place, he adds: "The prisoner's allowance is bread and water; and I had often only the latter". But the gold that is refined in the hottest furnace comes out the purest; or, as he

himself has expressed it, "the canary-bird sings sweeter the longer it has been trained in a darkened cage".

A man like Burns might have divided his hours between poetry and virtuous industry; industry which all true feeling sanctions, nay prescribes, and which has a beauty, for that cause, beyond the pomp of thrones: but to divide his hours between poetry and rich men's banquets was an ill-starred and inauspicious attempt. How could he be at ease at such banquets? What had he to do there, mingling his music with the coarse roar of altogether earthly voices; brightening the thick smoke of intoxication with fire lent him from heaven? Was it his aim to *enjoy* life? To-morrow he must go drudge as an Exciseman! We wonder not that Burns became moody, indignant, and at times an offender against certain rules of society; but rather that he did not grow utterly frantic, and run *amuck* against them all. How could a man, so falsely placed, by his own or others' fault, ever know contentment or peaceable diligence for an hour? What he did, under such perverse guidance, and what he forbore to do, alike fill us with astonishment at the natural strength and worth of his character.

Doubtless there was a remedy for this perverseness; but not in others; only in himself; least of all in simple increase of wealth and worldly "respectability". We hope we have now heard enough about the efficacy of wealth for poetry, and to make poets happy. Nay,

have we not seen another instance of it in these very days? Byron, a man of an endowment considerably less ethereal than that of Burns, is born in the rank not of a Scottish ploughman, but of an English peer: the highest worldly honours, the fairest worldly career, are his by inheritance; the richest harvest of fame he soon reaps, in another province, by his own hand. And what does all this avail him? Is he happy, is he good, is he true? Alas, he has a poet's soul, and strives towards the Infinite and the Eternal; and soon feels that all this is but mounting to the house-top to reach the stars! Like Burns, he is only a proud man; might, like him, have "purchased a pocket-copy of Milton to study the character of Satan"; for Satan also is Byron's grand exemplar, the hero of his poetry, and the model apparently of his conduct. As in Burns's case too, the celestial element will not mingle with the clay of earth; both poet and man of the world he must not be; vulgar Ambition will not live kindly with poetic Adoration; he *cannot* serve God and Mammon. Byron, like Burns, is not happy; nay, he is the most wretched of all men. His life is falsely arranged: the fire that is in him is not a strong, still, central fire, warming into beauty the products of a world; but it is the mad fire of a volcano; and now,—we look sadly into the ashes of a crater, which erelong will fill itself with snow!

Byron and Burns were sent forth as missionaries to their generation, to teach it a higher Doctrine, a purer Truth; they had a message

to deliver, which left them no rest till it was accomplished; in dim throes of pain, this divine behest lay smouldering within them; for they knew not what it meant, and felt it only in mysterious anticipation, and they had to die without articulately uttering it. They are in the camp of the Unconverted; yet not as high messengers of rigorous though benignant truth, but as soft flattering singers, and in pleasant fellowship, will they live there: they are first adulated, then persecuted; they accomplish little for others; they find no peace for themselves, but only death and the peace of the grave. We confess, it is not without a certain mournful awe that we view the fate of these noble souls, so richly gifted, yet ruined to so little purpose with all their gifts. It seems to us there is a stern moral taught in this piece of history,—*twice* told us in our own time! Surely to men of like genius, if there be any such, it carries with it a lesson of deep impressive significance. Surely it would become such a man, furnished for the highest of all enterprises, that of being the Poet of his Age, to consider well what it is that he attempts, and in what spirit he attempts it. For the words of Milton are true in all times, and were never truer than in this: "He, who would write heroic poems, must make his whole life a heroic poem". If he cannot first so make his life, then let him hasten from this arena; for neither its lofty glories, nor its fearful perils, are fit for him. Let him dwindle into a modish balladmonger; let him worship and besing the

idols of the time, and the time will not fail to reward him. If, indeed, he can endure to live in that capacity! Byron and Burns could not live as idol-priests, but the fire of their own hearts consumed them; and better it was for them that they could not. For it is not in the favour of the great or of the small, but in a life of truth, and in the inexpugnable citadel of his own soul, that a Byron's or a Burns's strength must lie. Let the great stand aloof from him, or know how to reverence him. Beautiful is the union of wealth with favour and furtherance for literature; like the costliest flower-jar enclosing the loveliest amaranth. Yet let not the relation be mistaken. A true poet is not one whom they can hire by money or flattery to be a minister of their pleasures, their writer of occasional verses, their purveyor of table-wit; he cannot be their menial, he cannot even be their partisan. At the peril of both parties, let no such union be attempted! Will a Courser of the Sun work softly in the harness of a Dray-horse? His hoofs are of fire, and his path is through the heavens, bringing light to all lands; will he lumber on mud highways, dragging ale for earthly appetites from door to door?

But we must stop short in these considerations, which would lead us to boundless lengths. We had something to say on the public moral character of Burns; but this also we must forbear. We are far from regarding him as guilty before the world, as guiltier than the average; nay from doubting that he is less

guilty than one of ten thousand. Tried at a tribunal far more rigid than that where the *Plebiscita* of common civic reputations are pronounced, he has seemed to us even there less worthy of blame than of pity and wonder. But the world is habitually unjust in its judgments of such men; unjust on many grounds, of which this one may be stated as the substance: It decides, like a court of law, by dead statutes; and not positively but negatively, less on what is done right, than on what is or is not done wrong. Not the few inches of deflection from the mathematical orbit, which are so easily measured, but the *ratio* of these to the whole diameter, constitutes the real aberration. This orbit may be a planet's, its diameter the breadth of the solar system; or it may be a city hippodrome; nay the circle of a ginhorse, its diameter a score of feet or paces. But the inches of deflection only are measured: and it is assumed that the diameter of the ginhorse, and that of the planet, will yield the same ratio when compared with them! Here lies the root of many a blind, cruel condemnation of Burnses, Swifts, Rousseaus, which one never listens to with approval. Granted, the ship comes into harbour with shrouds and tackle damaged; the pilot is blameworthy; he has not been all-wise and all-powerful: but to know *how* blameworthy, tell us first whether his voyage has been round the Globe, or only to Ramsgate and the Isle of Dogs.

With our readers in general, with men of right feeling anywhere, we are not required to

plead for Burns. In pitying admiration he lies enshrined in all our hearts, in a far nobler mausoleum than that one of marble; neither will his Works, even as they are, pass away from the memory of men. While the Shakspeares and Miltons roll on like mighty rivers through the country of Thought, bearing fleets of traffickers and assiduous pearl-fishers on their waves; this little Valclusa Fountain will also arrest our eye: for this also is of Nature's own and most cunning workmanship, bursts from the depths of the earth, with a full gushing current, into the light of day; and often will the traveller turn aside to drink of its clear waters, and muse among its rocks and pines!

Notes

This Essay appeared in *The Edinburgh Review* for December, 1828. It was occasioned by the appearance of Lockhart's *Life of Burns*, issued in May, 1828, as Vol. XXIII. of *Constable's Miscellany*, which was so successful as to be totally disposed of in six weeks. Numerous editions of it have been reprinted, and its value as an authority, close to the period, yet not so close as to miss the focus, is high. Though his reputation is firmly based on his larger work, *The Life of Scott*, the plan and style of his smaller biography, together with his clear and balanced exposition, are calculated to show the skill and masterly touch of Lockhart as a critic and biographer.

85. *Butler.* The author of *Hudibras.* "Praise", says Johnson, "was his sole reward. It is reported that the king once gave him three hundred guineas; but of this temporary bounty I find no proof."

brave mausoleum. To which the remains of the poet were transferred on Sept. 12, 1815. The structure, says Lockhart, is more gaudy than elegant.

86. *sixth narrative.* Heron's in 1797, Currie's in 1800, Cromek's in 1808, Walker's in 1811, Peterkin's in 1815, Lockhart's in 1828.

hero to his valet. The phrase, a favourite text of our author, is by Voltaire from Montaigne.

Sir Thomas Lucy and *John a Combe* figure in the mythical accounts of Shakspere's early life, the former as the not improbable original of Justice Shallow. "Tradition says that Shakspere joined some wild young fellows in breaking into Sir Thomas Lucy's park at Charlecote, about three miles from Stratford, and stealing his deer, for which, and for writing an impossibly bad ballad against Sir Thomas, the latter so persecuted the poet that he had to leave Stratford" (Furnivall).

87. *Excise Commissioners*, to whom Burns had applied through the Earl of Glencairn, Mr. Graham of Fintry, and others, for a post in the Excise.

87. *Caledonian Hunt.* "Lord Glencairn made interest with the Caledonian Hunt (an association of the most distinguished members of the northern aristocracy) to accept the dedication of the forthcoming edition, and to subscribe individually for copies" (Lockhart).

Ayr Writers. *E.g.*, Burns's friends Gavin Hamilton, Robert Aiken, &c.—'writers' being a Scotch term for solicitors, law-agents.

New and Old Light Clergy. The more advanced and the conservative sections in theology of the Church of Scotland.

Dr. Currie. James Currie, M.D. (1756–1805), the author of the *Life of Burns* prefixed to the *Works* in 4 vols., 1800.

Mr. Walker. "Josiah Walker, a countryman and intimate friend of the poet himself, not guiltless of flirtation with the Muse, and afterwards Professor of Latin in the University of Glasgow" (Prof. Blackie). Josiah is a painfully "superior" person, and one would like to have in return the poet's views on the professor, who met Burns in Edinburgh through the medium of Blacklock when he himself was tutor in the Athole family.

91. *Born in an age.* On 25th January, 1759, when there was little creative spirit abroad, and when, like Milton, he might have thought that he had been born "an age too late for heroic poesy"—"the withered, unbelieving, second-hand eighteenth-century, with its artificial pasteboard figures and productions" (Carlyle).

93. *write a tragedy.* "Mr. Ramsay of Auchtertyre on the Teith, a friend of Blacklock, advised him strongly to turn his attention to the romantic drama, and proposed the *Gentle Shepherd* of Allan Ramsay as a model; he also urged him to write *Scottish Georgics*, observing that Thomson had by no means exhausted that field" (Lockhart).

Sir Hudson Lowe, K.C.B.: the governor of St. Helena and warder of Napoleon during his detention there.

93. *melancholy main.*

"As when a shepherd of the Hebrid-Isles,
Plac'd far amid *the melancholy main.*"
—Thomson: *Castle of Indolence*, i. 30.

"In the Dutch garden is a fine bronze bust of Napoleon, which Lord Holland put up in 1817 while Napoleon was a prisoner at St. Helena. The inscription was selected by his Lordship, and is remarkably happy. It is from Homer's *Odyssey*. I will translate it extempore:

"In an islet's narrow bound,
With the great Ocean roaring round,
The captive of a foeman base,
He pines to view his native place."
—Macaulay.

pity and fear. The subjects, according to Aristotle in his *Poetics*, of tragedy.

96. "*quick to learn.*"

"The poor inhabitant below
Was *quick to learn* and wise to know,
And keenly felt the friendly glow,
And softer flame;
But thoughtless follies laid him low
And stain'd his name." —Burns.

"Scarcely anything in the tragic story of his later years is more sad than that confession, which appears so early as the first Kilmarnock edition of his poems" (Prof. Blackie).

quarrelling with smugglers. "Who can open the page of Burns and remember without a blush that the author was doomed to earn mere bread for his children by casting up the stock of publicans' cellars, and riding over moors and mosses in quest of smuggling stills—a common gauger among the wilds of Nithsdale?" (Lockhart).

98. *Horace's rule.* "If you wish me to weep, you must grieve yourself"; *i.e.* an author, to impress, must first have felt the impression himself. (Horace: *Ars Poetica*, 102.)

100. *does not the character of their author.* For this characteristic feature of Byron, see above on the Goethe Essay.

101. *inflated tone.* This is more especially true of the letters to Clarinda, for which the sentimental tone of Sterne, and Henry Mackenzie in *The Man of Feeling*, served Burns as spurious models, "his letters are often full of all sorts of rant and rhodomontade—which to us, reading them coldly in our closets, and but little acquainted, and still less sympathizing with the character of the facetious persons to whom they were written, not unfrequently appears too extravagant for common use. But such stuff suited those to whom it was sent." (Prof. Wilson.) Lockhart practically agrees with this: "to be ascribed to his desire of accommodating himself to the habits and taste of certain buckish tradesmen of Edinburgh and other such like persons. That he should have condescended to any such compliances must be regretted; but, in most cases, it would probably be quite unjust to push our censure further than this."

102. *not master of English prose.* Surely a mistake, even with the limitations stated by Carlyle. No doubt, as Mr. J. Logie Robertson notes, the Kilmarnock Preface is "the worst specimen of Burns's prose that we know, probably written in haste, ungrammatical, tautological, pedantic, and inconsistent"; and in his dedication to the Caledonian Hunt "modern taste is offended with the big initial letters, and the personification of abstract qualities", quite in the Sterne-Rousseau vein. But, on the whole, the style of Burns and his power of phrase are fully as remarkable in his *Letters* as in his verse.

105. *"travels from Dan...all barren".* "I pity the man who can travel from Dan to Beersheba, and cry, 'Tis all barren'" (Sterne; *Sentimental Journey*: "In the street—Calais").

106. *Crockford's.* Like 'Almack's', fashionable assembly-rooms and club.

107. *Theocritus.* "The following trifles are not the productions of the poet who, with all the advantages of

learned art, and, perhaps amid the elegances and idlenesses of upper life, looks down for a rural theme, with an eye to Theocritus or Virgil" (Burns).

108. *burin of a Retzsch.* The charcoal sketch of Moritz Retzsch (1779–1857).

110. *Poussin-picture.* In the style of Nicholas Poussin (1594–1665), the French father of landscape painting.

111. *Professor Stewart.* For Carlyle's view of Dugald Stewart's theory of the poetical faculty, see note on the Goethe Essay.

112. *Shakspeare, it has been well observed.* By Coleridge in his *Table Talk.*

116. "*Indignation makes verses.*" "Facit indignatio versum" (*Juvenal*, i. 79).

117. *Johnson said...hater.* A standard error, the remark not being by Johnson. It was made by his friend Dr. Bathurst, of whom he said: "Dear Bathurst was a man to my very heart's content; he hated a fool, and he hated a rogue, and he hated a Whig; he was a very good hater".

118. *Macpherson's Farewell.* "That grand lyric," as Lockhart previously had seen. James Macpherson, the freebooter, was hanged at the cross of Banff, on November 16, 1700.

Thebes and in Pelops' line. The main subjects of Greek Tragedy—"presenting Thebes, or Pelops' line" (Milton, *Il Penseroso*, 99), and dealing with, as Schlegel indicates, the constant struggle of Nemesis or Retributory Fate with human free-will.

120. *seldom aerial, poetical.* "It is not for the love of lovely words, perfections of human utterance, that we revert to Burns. Felicities he has, he has all manners of qualities: wit, fancy, humour, a sort of homespun verbal magic. But, if we be in quest of Beauty, we must e'en ignore him and fall to our English." (W. E. Henley.)

Tam o' Shanter. Here Carlyle agrees with later

critics that the central passage of *diablerie* in Kirk Alloway is rather incredible, and in preferring *The Jolly Beggars* as his masterpiece, which Burns did not value, and never printed during his lifetime.

122. *blanket of the Night.* "Nor heaven peep through the *blanket of the dark*" (*Macbeth*, i. 5. 53).

Teniers (died 1649): the great Dutch painter of rustic life.

Beggar's Opera, by Gay, 1727; *The Beggar's Bush*, by John Fletcher, in 1622.

123. *Ossorius.* Geronymo Osorio (1506–1586), "the Cicero of Portugal", born at Lisbon and educated at Salamanca. His *History of Emanuel I* in Latin (Eng. trans., 1752) is famous for the ease and finish of its style.

125. *Fletcher's aphorism.* By Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun (1653–1716); but in spirit at least it had been made by Plato, in his *Republic.*

126. *Our Grays and Glovers.* See above in the Goethe Essay.

Thomas Boston (1677–1732): minister of Ettrick.

127. *"fervid genius".* An allusion to the famous phrase "praefervidum ingenium Scotorum". John Hill Burton in the *Scot Abroad* attributes this to Andrew Rivet, a native of Poitou; but he is absurdly wrong: it occurs in Buchanan's *History* xvi. 51, written when Rivet was only a boy of ten.

our culture was exclusively French. "The influence of French thought was European. The Scotch, who had a traditional connection with France, were the first importers of the new views. Hume was only three years behind Voltaire in the historic field. *The Age of Louis XIV* was published in 1751, and the first volume of the *History of England* in 1754. But both Hume and Robertson surpassed their masters." (J. C. Morison, *Gibbon*, p. 101.)

Adam Smith. This assertion has been often repeated, but Smith was both prior to, and independent of,

the work of François Quernay (1694–1774) and Gabriel de Mably (1709–1785) in the field of political economy.

127. *La Flèche*, in Anjou, the residence for a time of Hume in France.

128. "*Doctrine of Rent.*" Associated with the name of David Ricardo (1772–1823), who defines rent as "that portion of the produce of the earth which is paid to the landlord for the use of the indestructible powers of the soil".

131. *the world still appears to him in borrowed colours.*

> "This life, sae far's I understand,
> Is a' enchanted fairy-land,
> Where pleasure is the magic wand
> That, wielded right,
> Makes hours like minutes, hand in hand,
> Dance by, fu' light."
> —*Epistle to James Smith.*

132. "*pre-established harmony*". In reference to the theory, of the relation of man to God, by Nicolas Malebranche (1638–1715).

134. *threatenings of unjust men...tears.* "My indignation yet boils at the recollection of the scoundrel factor's insolent letters, which used to set us all in tears" (Burns).

135. *in glory and in joy.* Carlyle misquotes Wordsworth's *The Leech Gatherer*:

> "I thought of Chatterton, the marvellous Boy,
> The sleepless Soul that perished in his pride;
> Of Him who walked in glory and in joy,
> Following his plough, along the mountain-side".

more exciting society. "I spent my seventeenth year on a smuggling coast, a good distance from home. The contraband trade was at that time very successful, and it sometimes happened to me to fall in with those who carried it on. Scenes of swaggering riot and roaring dissipation were till this time new to me. Here I learnt to fill my glass, and to mix without fear in a drunken squabble" (Burns). So at Irvine: "He was the only

man I ever saw who was a greater fool than myself, where woman was the presiding star; but he spoke of illicit love with the levity of a sailor, which hitherto I had regarded with horror" (Burns).

138. *his wild farewell to Scotland.* "That solemn and moving song—far and away the best, I think, and the sincerest thing he left in English—*The Gloomy Night is Gathering Fast*" (W. E. Henley).

140. *Virgilium vidi tantum.* "Virgil I merely saw," as Ovid, *Tristia*, iv. 10. 51, remarks of his predecessor, not being old enough to know him.

141. *Print of Bunbury's.* The lines by John Langhorne (1735–1779) in his *Country Justice* (1774–1777) in the manner of Crabbe, referring to the campaign of Minden, and Quebec, the year of Pitt's greatest triumph, 1759.

I whispered my information. The late Dr. Grosart informed me that this actual print in the actual frame, as seen by Burns, still exists. It was given by Sir Adam Ferguson, the son of the Professor, to Robert Chambers, and now hangs in the Chambers Institute, Peebles. He drew Chambers's attention to the fact that the name of Langhorne is *lithographed on the print opposite the lines*, and believed Scott derived his knowledge from the actual print, and that long after he had forgotten the source of his information. But Lockhart mentions Scott's early "devotion to Langhorne and Mickle".

142. *Allan Ramsay and Fergusson.* "To the genius of a *Ramsay*, or the glorious dawnings of the poor, unfortunate *Fergusson*, he, with equal unaffected sincerity, declares that, even in his highest pulse of vanity, he has not the most distant pretensions. These two justly admired Scotch poets he has often had in his eye in the following pieces; but rather with a view to kindle at at their flame, than for servile imitation." (Burns: Preface to Kilmarnock edition.)

143. *sharper feeling of Fortune's*, &c. "When I must stalk into a corner, lest the rattling equipage of some gaping blockhead should mangle me in the mire, I am tempted to exclaim: What merits has he had, or what demerits have I had that he is ushered into this

state of being with the sceptre of rule in his puny fist, and I kicked into the world, the sport of folly, or the victim of pride? Often as I have glided with humble stealth through the pomp of Prince's Street," &c. &c. (Burns.)

145. *his Excise and Farm scheme.* "I got this without any hanging on, or mortifying solicitations. It is immediate bread, and, though poor in comparison of the last eighteen months of my existence, 'tis luxury in comparison of all my preceding life. Besides, the Commissioners are some of them my acquaintances, and all of them my firm friends." (Burns.)

147. *These men were proximately the means of his ruin.* "These men came to see him: it was out of no sympathy with him, nor no hatred to him. They came to get a little amusement: they got their amusement; and the Hero's life went for it." (Carlyle: *Hero as Man of Letters.*)

148. *collision with Superiors.* In sending some guns, captured from a smuggling vessel, with a letter to the French Convention, requesting that body to accept of them as a mark of his admiration and respect.

160. *Cervantes in prison.* Carlyle constantly repeats this error about Cervantes, who did not write *Don Quixote* in prison.

The Araucana. Alonzo Ercilla (1530–1595) joined the expedition sent to Chili against the Araucanians, described in his epic of *La Araucana.*

161. *has no Religion.* "The religion of Burns lay more in an undercurrent of emotion than in a commanding seat of control. His piety, like all the rest of his noble virtues, so nobly expressed in rhyme, suffered in practice from the weakness of his will. Without a strong will no man can be a complete character, or great in action. No man knew this better than Burns." (Prof. Blackie.)

like that of Rabelais. "As for these stories—how he died making an irreverent pun, how he said he was going to seek a *grand peut-etre*, and so on—we may dismiss them" (Walter Besant).

164. *Byron...fire of a volcano.*

"The fire that on my bosom preys
Is lone as some *volcanic* isle:
No torch is lighted at its blaze—
A funeral pile." —Byron, 1824.

165. *worship and besing.* For 'besing', and the favourite Carlylean coinage, see note on 'betrumpet and beshout' in the Goethe Essay.

168. *Valclusa Fountain.* A reference to the residence of Petrarch in the Valley of Vaucluse at Avignon, where he wrote his sonnets and canzonets on Laura.