

proud sensibility of his nature, that, when walking the streets of London, with famine tearing at his vitals, he was in the habit of refusing invitations to dinner, which he well knew were given from compassion. Once, and once only, he was prevailed on to await supper—and then his enjoyment of it evinced the instinctive voracity which accompanies the last degree of starvation. With a horrid despair thus gathering over him, partly, it must be admitted, brought on by his own proud dishonesty, he became his own self-avenger. The cup of life had become bitter to his taste, and to end the draught he mingled arsenic with its ingredients. Coleridge exclaims:

(O! Chatterton, that thou wast still alive,
Sure thou wouldst spread thy canvass to the gale,
And love with us the tinkling team to drive
O'er peaceful freedom's undivided dale—
And we at sober eve would round thee throng,
Hanging enraptured on thy stately song—
And greet with smiles the young-eyed poetry,
All deftly masked as hour antiquity.

The arguments for and against the authenticity of Rowley's poems are now of little interest. Such as they are, however, they may be simply, and very briefly stated. Against the authenticity, it is said, that Chatterton produced but few verses of pretended original MSS.—whereas, if he had many such treasures, he would have been proud to show them; the likelihood that from an early love of antiquarian lore, his genius would have taken this course; the confession of poor Chatterton himself, that he had written one piece at least, which appeared in the counterfeit style; the probability that he who could write one could write more; the knowledge of an intimate acquaintance, who was aware that he had blackened and disfigured parchments that he had sent to the printer's for old MSS.; the evidence of another friend, who traced in Chatterton's conversation, and in the pretended poems of Rowley, the same tone and the same ideas; the variation of the hand-writing of the pieces; the absence of any allusion to Rowley in contemporaneous documents; the want of faults in the poems themselves, which belong to the times in which they profess to have been written; the anachronisms of incident or reference; the inconsistencies of measure and of language; the imitations of subsequent writers—all these are alleged as sufficient to convict Chatterton of fabrication and imposition.

On the other side are urged: Chatterton's love of fame, which, if he had written such poems, would impel him to claim the glory; his own repeated assertions, and his adherence to such assertions; the short time which he had to produce

such a quantity of MSS.; the allusion to facts and customs; the use of ancient words, in no dictionaries at Chatterton's command;—these, with most abortive attempts to answer positive arguments, make, the sum of all that can be said in favour of Rowley's authenticity and Chatterton's honesty. We thus find Chatterton in the paradoxical position of giving up his honesty to lose that personal fame which so many barter honesty to acquire.

I am not about to enter on a specific criticism of his works, but merely to revert to such memories as half-forgotten reading may suggest. "Ella, a tragical Interlude," is a stately drama, of English thought and phraseology, wanting in passion and incident, but having uncommon poetic beauty. In the "Parliament of Sprites," we have a wild and luxurious fertility of antique and descriptive poetry; that which revels in the past of Britain—that in which Shakspeare found scenery for his "Midsummer Night's Dream"—that in which Memory and Imagination meet and rejoice together. I do not know any other land where the rural sentiment is so strong as it is in England. The habits of the people seem from the first to have wedded them to nature; and the nature to which they were familiar was of that middle order between the gentle and the gigantic, which best nurtures the rural sentiment. We find accordingly, this sentiment to be the ruling one in their sports; the sentiment which trained them to archery, which placed their amusements on the green-sward, or amidst the woodlands—which made the wild free forest the very Paradise of their desire. "This sentiment is immortalised in Robin Hood, in his man John, and such other green-wood outlaws. This sentiment overflows, therefore, in every grade of English poetry: in ballad, song, drama, ode and epic. Chatterton evinces that sympathy with the luxuriance of rural imagery, which belongs to the poetry native to his country, and especially to the best of its earlier verses. "Wharwell" is one of his finest antique counterfeits. It is wild and romantic in the highest degree; it displays immense force and imagination, and a great range of poetical expression. "Bothwell" is a story, dark, dismal and pitiful. Both parties of disputants as to Mary of Scotland's guilt or innocence, may quarrel until Doomsday; but none of them could turn from this affecting story, without being charmed by its interest and pathos. We have the savage warrior, after years of captivity and madness, dismayed, at intervals of sanity, by terrible glancings of memory, which reveal his beautiful "ladye love," as she was seen in the pride of her loveliness, and then bring his intellect back to the present, to survey the cold