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## NOTES ON BURNS.

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**T**HERE is hardly any poet to whom we approach with prepossessions so strong as those with which we come to the study of Burns. To those who are able to understand his language without difficulty he appeals with irresistible force; and many have found it worth their while to undergo the labor of understanding his language in order that they might come to a more perfect comprehension of his poetry.

There will always be differences of opinion—perhaps rather differences of feeling—about the character of Burns. His generosity and nobility, his hatred of insincerity and hypocrisy, the affectionateness and sympathetic kindness of his disposition can hardly be ignored by any. The darker side of his character is, alas, only too conspicuous. If he was never, in the full sense of the word, a drunkard, he was not unfrequently guilty of intemperance. It has been urged that, in this respect, he was no worse than other men of his day. It has also been urged that the hypocrisy of many of the professing religious people about him drove him to extremes in the other direction. These pleas may be urged as extenuations for weakness, they can hardly be regarded as defences or apologies.

Although Burns had little knowledge of his great contemporaries, and

comparatively no connection with them, yet he belonged to a great age, and could not have been uninfluenced by the currents of thought which moved around him. Cowper was born twenty-eight years before him, and died four years after him. Goethe was born eighteen years later, in 1749. Wordsworth in 1770, Scott in 1771, Coleridge in 1772, Southey in 1774. Burns was born in 1759 and died 1796.

As regards the poetry of Burns, there is hardly, and there has hardly ever been, a difference of opinion. Its excellence was recognized in his own country at once. Up to the present time there has been no interval in which it has been neglected or depreciated, as has been the case with many other poets; and we may safely prophesy perpetuity and immortality to his fame, unless his language should be forgotten. Even in that case attention will be given to the obsolete dialect for the sake of the poetry which it enshrines.

If we must call him the very first of Scottish poets, we must also give him a high place among the lyric poets of every age and nation; and it is to this class that his poetry principally belongs, although "Tam o' Shanter" shows that he was not incapable of epic poetry.

It is curious to notice the vicissi-