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## THE RELIGION OF BURNS' POEMS.

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It has been remarked that the most difficult thing about the painting of a landscape picture is to know just where to sit down.

Before the vigorous, erratic, versatile genius of Robert Burns, reflect-as it does upon every conceivable phase of life, it is difficult in a short paper like this to know just where to begin. Amid such a galaxy of talent, the difficulty is apparent of finding an advantageous starting-point.

There is no more world-notorious fact in matters religious than the prevalence in Scotland of the sternest, most uncompromising species of bluest Calvinism. Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes once passed a remark which the purport was: He could never understand how Scotland, Calvinistic, straight-laced Scotland, could clasp her national poet to her bosom without bursting her laces. Her laces *are* bursting. The pen of Robert Burns wrote the death warrant of Scotia's Calvinistic God. The sentence may be slow in execution, but his utter extinction is as sure as the immortality of Caledonia's national bard. "If the poet's arrows are barbed with wit," says Rev. David Macrae, a popular Scottish minister, "they were also barbed with truth, and Calvinism could not shake them off. The dogma of election ever since Burns's day has been ebbing from the forefront of Scottish theology. The tone of preaching has been insensibly changing." It has been declared with tiresome repetition that there is no religion in Burns's poems, but merely ruthless declamation. If a man was in the undesirable embrace of an octopus and valiantly rescued him from its cruel arms, you would scarcely expect him to reprove you for ruthlessly destroying his companion and not providing a more congenial comrade on the spot!

Robert Burns did exalt a nobler, purer conception of the Deity ("O Thou known, Almighty Cause"); but had he never done so our eternal attitude is his that, recognizing the futility of appealing to reason, he wielded his pen in gall and, with scathing satire, jeered the God of Calvinism into the bottomless pit from whence he came:

O Thou, wha in the heavens dost dwell,

Wha, as it pleases best Thyself,