

popular form. A Lecture on the pleasures of Literature would certainly be very deficient without some remarks, however hackneyed, on the great national poet of England, William Shakspeare, who is perhaps the very greatest of uninspired writers, and is well deserving of the profoundest study. From the vast range and comprehensiveness of his genius, he has been called the "myriad minded Shakspeare." He is in truth a splendid author, and stores of wisdom and wit may be gathered from his fertile pages. He wrote about thirty seven plays, almost any one of which would have been sufficient to render his name immortal. There is such a grasp of thought in them that they will admit of being read over and over again, and still be as fresh and delightful as ever. Mr. H. stated that he was aware that many well meaning people had a prejudice against the reading of all such works; but it was an unfounded one, and arose from their ignorantly associating the drama with what is low and debasing. As well might we be averse to all forms of religion, because there are many false views abroad upon the subject, and because the outward conduct of such sects as Jumpers, Shakers, Mormons, and other sects of monstrous and incredible creed, tends to throw it into contempt. While admitting that there are doubtless many bad productions of this kind, many that have a dissipating and immoral tendency, he did not think that this could be fairly charged upon the writings of Shakspeare, except by those whose bigotry was a thing far more disagreeable than anything the Bard of Avon ever wrote. Though not what may strictly be called a christian poet, he has little in his works of which any right minded christian need be ashamed. His great talent consisted in describing man as he really is—in all his grandeur and littleness—in his glory and in his shame. He holds the mirror up to nature; and from the peasant to the prince, in his teeming vortices we behold every conceivable variety almost of human character described with the utmost truthfulness. There is scarcely a feeling or passion that sways powerfully the human heart, which is not described by him not only with the utmost fidelity, but also in the choicest language. Pride, avarice, ambition, hatred, envy, jealousy, as well as love, courage, friendship, affection,—in short, all the emotional parts of man's being are arrayed in living colors and graphic relief in his fertile page, and delineated by the hand of a master, one who knew well how to touch every cord in man's bosom. And if it be true that "the proper study of mankind is man," then indeed are the writings of him, who has so justly been termed the high priest of English literature deserving of a careful perusal, which they will amply repay.

But if England can boast of her William Shakspeare, Scotland can also claim for herself the honor of producing a Poet of scarcely less genius—our great national bard Robert Burns, whom all Scotchmen,

living in every quarter of the world, must ever be proud to acknowledge as a fellow countrymen. He said he need not pause to describe works which have already enchanted millions, and which have not yet won half their triumph. In the presence of those of kindred blood, it was quite superfluous to recommend the ploughman poet of Ayrshire, whose unmatched songs are in every body's memory, and in the heart of every true son of Old Scotia. For depth of pathos, tenderness of feeling, sweetness of versification, and power of imagery, he has few equals and no superiors in any language. Of his character as a man he did not now speak. As a fallen son of Adam he had his faults and failings, and dearly did he pay the penalty of his follies. But we are to remember that perfection is not to be sought for among men, and that there are spots even in the sun. At the same time he would by no means be understood as attempting to defend the grievous vice of which he was, alas the victim. If our hearts are warmed and our imaginations delighted by the rare excellence of his poetry, we ought also if we are wise to seek to derive instruction from his life, which shows that even the greatest minds may be overcome by habits of drunkenness, which sooner or later produce their ruinous effects upon all who yield to them. Were there no other example, that of Burns is sufficient to prove that understanding alone will not keep a man from being a drunkard. He knew as well as any Temperance Lecturer could have told him—even though that man had been Gough himself,—the dire consequences of habits of intoxication,—and yet with his eyes wide open, he ran headlong to destruction. At the early age of 37, he died; and it is an unquestionable fact, that his end was hastened by addiction to the Bottle, which has quenched many a bright spirit, and sent them to a premature grave. But it may be some palliation to consider the time in which Burns lived. Temperance had not then lifted up in the streets, her meek imploring voice, nor begun her earnest cry to the miserable devotee of Bacchus, "touch not, taste not, handle not—poison is in the cup—and ruin and death must be your final portion!!" Burns was a most social spirit; and coupled with the prevailing customs of his times to drink deep at the midnight bowl, this was the cause of his ruin, and of many a one besides, who loved good company and good liquor. In Burns' time, and even much later than that, it would have been high treason to refuse a dram, and regarded as a regular insult not to take a hearty glass when it was offered you. But fortunately times have now greatly changed for the better—the drinking usages of the country are now fast going down—the cause of Temperance has unfurled its flag, and thousands upon thousands, warned in time, are flocking around its peaceful standard.

The circumstance now alluded to, the Lecturer continued, will also account for

the character of many of Burns' songs—the praise of the Bottle. They indicate a familiarity with low scenes and habits; and it is to be regretted that they were ever written; for there can be no question that when vice is gilded by the band of genius, it loses much of its ugliness, and becomes in fact not unfrequently a kind of virtue. Had the poet lived at the present day, with all the light which we now enjoy, it is difficult to say what he might have been, but one thing is sure—he was one of those who readily yielded when temptation was in the way; although it may be allowed in charity to plead, that his bacchanalian lyrics were written when Burns was not himself, and would never have seen the light had the poet been aware of the full extent of the evil he was unconsciously perpetuating. He who longed for and sat so fondly of the time

"When men to men the world o'er  
Shall Brothers be,"

must surely be supposed to have been a greater lover of his species!

After some remarks on the character of Milton as a poet, and a passing glance at the other great English writers, Mr. H. next proceeded to make a few observations on science and the pleasures arising from this source of literary gratification. In this department, he said, some men find little pleasure, while others are quite at home. It is however a characteristic of a Scotchman to desire to know the reasons of things—hence his fondness for religious controversy, more particularly when in perfectly educated. For every why he must have a wherefore. Even although holding but a few acres of land, he desires to cultivate them on scientific principles. It is happy one of the leading features of the present day that science, has been brought down to the level of the popular understanding, and rendered interesting and instructive to all classes of readers, so that this kind of knowledge may now be very easily acquired. How elevating for instance, the study of Astronomy which is now one of the most exact of the sciences! How it expands the mind, now and then to dwell on the vast and boundless field which it opens up for our speculations! It is true the common individual who is altogether ignorant of the science, may have his reverential feelings aroused on beholding the midnight sky bespangled with thousands of twinkling stars, as well as the most skilful philosopher and he may, equally with him be led by such a glorious spectacle to own that the hand that made them is divine. But still this affords no argument whatever against the systematic study of astronomy by which are furnished additional manifestations of the power, wisdom, and goodness of the deity, and by which there is opened up an endless source of profitable and interesting reflection on the wondrous harmony which reigns throughout the vast domain of universal nature. Mr. H. further, under the head, recommended the study of nature