

THE REAL ROBERT BURNS.

BY G. W. FOOTE.

II. Burns as a Freethinker.

"In his sunny moods," wrote Carlyle, "a full, buoyant flood of mirth rolls through the mind of Burns." "The master-quality of Burns," Mr. Henley says, "the quality which has gone, and will ever go, the furthest to make him universally and perennially acceptable, is humor." Mr. Henley thinks his sentiment is sometimes strained, and often rings a little false. "But his humor—broad, rich, prevailing, now lascivious or gargantuan and now fanciful or jocose, now satirical and brutal and now instinct with sympathy—is ever irresistible." This is true and admirably put. We should say that Mr. Henley understands and enjoys Burns's humor better than Carlyle did; and for this reason, we fancy, he does not share Carlyle's regret that Burns expended so much of his humor upon the orthodox clergy of the local Kirk. Perhaps it ought to be stated, in this connection, that Carlyle lived more than half a century after writing his Burns article, and that he in turn expended much of his humor upon the clergy of all denominations. However, this is what Carlyle wrote in 1828:

"It seems to us another circumstance of fatal import in Burns's history that at this time 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 another set of conjurers than these men to exorcise."

This is the voice of a Scottish student fresh from the schools of Calvinism; from whose influence, by the way, he never quite escaped; for, just as Carlyle retained his native brogue almost unimpaired during his more than forty years' residence in London, so he retained to the last the prejudices he imbibed with his education. His intelligence saw through the dogmas he had been taught, but the spirit of them always dwelt in his feelings.

Mr. Henley comes later, and has been trained in a broader-minded school. He notices with satisfaction that Burns was "the most anti-clerical" as well as the most popular poet of Scotland. "Being a Scot," Mr. Henley says, "he was instinctively a theologian; being himself, he was inevitably liberal-minded; born a peasant of genius, and therefore a natural rebel, he could not choose but quarrel with the Kirk, especially as her hand was heavy on his friends and himself." And again in a footnote: "He was ever a theological liberal and a theological disputant—a champion of Heterodoxy, in however mild a form, whose disputa-