

with which they have been received will no doubt contribute to the perpetuating this most pleasing description of novel writing. In almost all the works of this class from the pen of this Great Unknown, we find the names he gives them marked by a peculiarity in selection. Unlike the great majority of Novelists he never designates the work by the name of the principal character, nor from any of the most material events on which the plot hangs; but either takes the name of some of the inferior personages; or that of the place where the scene lies.

The language of this writer forms another distinctive mark of his productions. In the various attempts to identify him, this peculiarity has been laid hold of; and conjecture for (*stat nomen in umbra*) has generally ascribed these works to the pen of an eminent Scotch Barrister. This opinion has gained strength from the obvious fact of the writer (whoever he is) being so well acquainted with the different provincial dialects of Scotland. His critical knowledge of that language in former times, as evinced in the expressions he puts in the mouths of his *Dramatis personæ*; many of whose epithets and phrases are, (from the fluctuations incident to a living language) not used in these districts at the present day. In those parts of his writings where he employs his own language, and more particularly in his descriptions of characters or scenery, we find a style possessing a rich softness, united with a pointedness and force of expression, entirely his own. If it at any time appears to approximate to what is termed floridness, there is never superfluity nor bombast. On minute examination it will be discovered that no word can be abstracted without a diminution of effect; and none can be added but at the risk of producing turgidity.

Critics have discovered different degrees of merit on a comparative view of the various works of this author; and it must be confessed that some of them have pleased the public more than others. It is hardly within the scope of the greatest genius who writes so much and with so great rapidity to be equally eminent in all his productions. The first of them, while it established his fame on a solid basis, and decidedly vindicated his claim to a high rank among writers of this class, placed him where none has yet risen above him. Of other writers, it has been observed, that as they progressed in their literary labours, an improvement of their taste, and an encreased maturity of judgment, have given their latter works a superiority over their earlier productions. With this author no such change has occurred. He started at once as a Novelist, and no encrease of his celebrity has been attained. But although he has not progressively improved, he has never fallen off. The universal interest excited by the announcement of any thing from his pen marks how high he stands in public favour; and the continued firmness with which he has maintained the elevated station where he was first placed, through so long and uninterrupted a course, evinces a mind endowed with powers of great variety and extent; while the pleasure each of his successive works affords, may fairly be looked upon as the strongest proof of their excellence.

Much has been said and written respecting the utility of Novels; and no doubt much of the flimsy trash which has issued from the press under this name, deserves reprehension, being more adapted to do