

NOTICES OF NEW WORKS.

"Books, we know,
Are a substantial world, when pure and good.
Round these, with tendrils strong as flesh and blood,
Our pastime and our happiness will grow."

WORDSWORTH.

No. X.

MOTHERWELL'S POETICAL WORKS.*

BY EDMOND HUGOMONT.

THE first quarter of the present century was adorned by a cluster of poetical stars such as seldom, if ever, before shone on the literary world at one period. Scott, Byron, Campbell, Southey, Coleridge, Wordsworth—these are names which will always rank among the first of British Poets; whilst Crabbe, Shelley, Keats, Kirke White, Pollok and others, form a band of subordinates, who at almost any other time would have claimed, and worthily, the first rank. The distinctive poetical features of the second quarter of the century, now so nearly at a close, have been very different. Never, perhaps, in the history of English literature, have appeared within a like time, so many *good poets*—men of genuine feeling, of smooth yet vigorous language, and of true poetic fire; and yet seldom has a similar period elapsed without the production of at least one *great poem*. Of those whose works have been issued from the press during the last twenty years, few more thoroughly deserved the name of Poet than the author of the book now under review, although uncongenial circumstances restrained his poetic genius, and, in his mature years, the stern warfare of political life left him little time for its exercise.

William Motherwell, the descendant of a family long settled on the banks of the Carron, in Stirlingshire, was born at Glasgow, in the year 1797. His school-boy days were spent in Edinburgh and Paisley, in which latter place he commenced, in his fifteenth year, the study of the legal profession. That he attended to these studies with assiduity, is evident from the circumstance that at the early age of twenty-two, he was appointed Sheriff Clerk Depute of Renfrewshire, the County within which Paisley is situated. This office he held till the year 1830,

when he removed to Glasgow to undertake the editorship of the *Glasgow Courier*, a Tory newspaper, (there *were* Tories in these days,) of excellent standing and large circulation. It was a time of keen excitement and public turmoil, and Motherwell entered into the contest with heart and soul;—"he drew the sword and threw away the scabbard," and rushed into the thickest of the political fight.

Previous to this time, Motherwell had contributed many poetical pieces to the pages of various periodicals in Paisley, Edinburgh and Glasgow, but it was not till the year 1832, that these were first published in a collected form. How this volume was welcomed by the public may be gathered from the following remarks of his biographer, Mr. MacConechy.

"This volume was, upon the whole, well received. There could be no doubt about the high quality of the poetry which an unknown author had ventured thus to submit to the world, but its character was peculiar, and for the most part not fitted for extensive popularity, and the season which was chosen for its introduction was eminently unfavourable to its chances of immediate success. No adventitious murmurs of applause had announced its approach, and at a time when little was heard but the noise of political contention, it was perhaps too much to expect that a comparatively obscure bard should draw towards himself a large share of the public notice, let his abilities be what they might. This work, however, gave Motherwell, what it had been the object of his life to attain, a place among the poets of Britain; and it carried it into quarters which it never would have otherwise reached. A commendatory criticism in Blackwood's Magazine for April, 1833, proclaimed his pretensions wherever the English language is read; and though his nature was too modest and too manly for the display of any open exultation at the triumph which he had so honourably won, he never ceased to feel the deepest gratitude to the distinguished reviewer, whom he knew to be a consummate judge of poetic

* The Poetical Works of William Motherwell; with Memoir, by James MacConechy. Glasgow, David Robertson; Montreal, John McCoy.