

POETRY.

THE SCOTTISH SACRAMENTAL SABBATH.

BY JAMES HISLOP.

River La Platta, 1824.

The Sabbath morning gilds the eastern hills,
The swains its sunny down wi' gladness greet,
Frae heath-clad hamlets 'mang the muirland rills,
The dewy mountains climb wi' naked feet—
Skiffin' the daisies druket i' the weat,
The nibblin' flocks come bleatin' down the brae,
To shadowy pastures screen'd frae simmer heat,
In woods where tinklin' waters glide away,
'Mang holms o' clover red, and bright brown rye-grass
hay.

His ewes and lambs brought careful frae the heigh,
The shepherd's children watch them frae the corn;
On green sward scented lawn, wi' gowans white,
Frae page o' pocket psalm-book, soiled an' torn,
The task prepar'd assign'd for Sabbath morn,
The elder bairns, their parents join in prayer,
One daughter dear, beneath the flowery thorn,
Kneels down apart, her spirit to prepare,
On this her first approach the sacred cup to share.
The social chat, wi' solemn converse mix'd,
At early hour, they finish their repast.
The pious sire repeats full many a text,
Of Sacramental Sabbaths, long gone past.
To see her little family featly drest,
The careful matron feels a mother's pride;
Gies this a linen shirt—gives that a vest—
The frugal father's frowns their finery chide;
He prays that Heaven their souls may wedding robes
provide.

The sisters buskit, seek the garden walk,
To gather flowers, and watch the warning bell,
Sweet-william danglin', dewy frae the stalk,
Is mix'd wi' mountain daisies rich in smell:
Green sweet-brier—sprigs an' daisies frae the dell,
Where Spango shepherds pass the lane a-dell,
An' Wanlock miners cross the muirland fell,
Then down the sunny winding woodland road,
The little pastoral band approach the house of God.

Stream of my native mountains, O how oft,
That Sabbath morning walk, in youth was mine;
Yet fancy hears the kirk bell, sweet an' soft,
Ring o'er the darkling woods o' dewy pine;
How oft the wood rose, rich wi' scented thyme,
I've stooped to pull, while passing on my way,
But now in sunny regions south the Line,
Nae birks nor broom flowers shade the summer brae—
Alas! I can but dream o' Scotland's Sabbath-day.

But dear that cherish'd dream I still behold:
The ancient kirk,* the plane-trees o'er it spread,
And seated 'mang the graves, the young, the old,
As once in simmer days for ever fled—
To deck my dream, the grave gives up its dead,
'The pale Precentor,† sings as then he sung,

The long lost Pastor † wi' the hoary head,
Pours forth his pious counsels to the young,
And dear ones from the dust again to life are sprung.

Lost friends return from realms beyond the main,
And boyhood's best beloved ones, all are there—
The blanks in family circles fill'd again,
No set it seems empty round the house of prayer;
The sound of Psalms has vanish'd in the air.
Borne up to heaven upon the mountain breeze—
The Patriarchal Priest wi' silvery hair,
In tent erected, 'neath the fresh green trees;
Spreads forth the Book of God, with holy pride, and
sees

The eyes of circling thousands on him fix'd,
The kirk yard scarce contains the mingling mass
Of kindred congregations round him mix'd,
Close seated on the grave-stones, and the grass—
Some crowd the garden walls—a wealthier class
On chairs and benches round the tent draw near—
The poor man prays far distant—and alas!
Some seated by the graves of parents dear,
Among the fresh green flowers, let fall the silent
tear.

Sublime the text he chooseth—"Who is this,
From Edom comes, with garments dyed in blood,
Travelling in greatness of his strength to bliss,
Treading the wine press of Almighty God?"—
Perchance the theme, that mighty One who rode
Forth leader of the armies, clothed in light:
Around whose fiery forehead rainbows glow'd,
Beneath whose tread Heaven trembled—angels bright,
Their shining ranks arranged around his head of
white.

Behold the contrast! Christ the King of kings,
A houseless wand'rer in a world below—
Faint, fasting, weary by the desert's springs,
From youth, a man of mourning and of woe.
The birds have nests on summer's blooming bough—
The foxes in the mountains find a bed,
But mankind's friend found every man his foe,
His heart with anguish in the Garden bled,
He, peaceful like a lamb, was to the slaughter led.

The action sermon ended, tables fenced,
While Elders forth the sacred symbols bring,
The day's more solemn service now commenced,
To Heaven is wafted, on devotion's wing,
The Psalms, these entering to the altar, sing,
"I'll of salvation take the cup—I'll call,
With trembling on the name of Zion's King—
His courts I'll enter—at his footstool fall,
And pay mine early vows before his people all."

Behold the crowded Tables clad in white,
Extending far above the flowery graves—
A blessing on the bread and wine-cups bright,
With lifted hands, the holy Pastor craves;
The simmer's sunny breeze his white hair waves,
His soul is with his Saviour in the sky,

* Sanquhar Kirk.

† James Hislop, a namesake of the poet.

‡ The Rev. Mr. Rankine.