

Tait's Magazine.

POETRY AND STEAM.

The man of genius is often looked upon as a being that shuts himself up and knows little of what is going on in the real world around him. He is supposed to live in a fairyland of his own creation—often a very barren and profitless one—delusions. In reference to him, men of arts and full of all manner of enchantments and magical sciences, the men of spinning-jennies and steam-engines—say, the naturalists, and many other writers—talk of themselves as practical men. They often smile at the poet and the romance-writer, as men of the world affect to do, and say—"Oh! a very clever, a very clever fellow indeed; but as ignorant of actual life as a child." But the poets and romancers of late have proved themselves both to be profitable fellows and practical ones. To say nothing of vast sums coined from the brain of Scott and of Byron, look at the comfortable nest which Moore has feathered for himself. Very pretty sums he has fobbed now and then. See old George Crabbe going down to his parsonage with £3,000 in his saddle-bags at one time. Look at the poet's house at Keswick: it has a library in it which has cost a fortune; and the poet and historian sits there now, what with salaries, pensions, Quarterly Review articles, and residuary legateeships, as no inconsiderable man of substance. There is that "old man eloquent" too, his neighbour, at Rydal Mount, who, if he have not amassed a mount of gold on which to build his palace, has got a poet's bower on one of the most delicious little knolls in Europe, warmed by as much affection and domestic peace as ever crowned one man's hearth; and having no mark or stamp of poverty about it. Yes, and spite of Edinburgh and Quarterly, and a host of lower critics who echoed their owl-notes, his poetry is become fashionable! Only think of that—"The Idiot Boy" and "Betty Foy," "The Old Wanderer" in his worsted stockings, and "Michael" and "The Wagoner," become fashionable, so that every critic who knows no more of poetry than he did ten years ago, now cries "glorious! divine! inimitable!" at every new edition of his poems. Yes, and so they shall cry—for such is the ultimate triumph of general sense and taste over professional stupidity. His poetry is become golden in all senses; and, if Government only act in the matter of copyright as a British government ought to act, it will flow on in a golden stream to his children's children, to the third and fourth—ay, to the fortieth and four hundredth generation.

These are your dreamers and thrifless poets of the present days! But they are not merely the profitable, they are the really practical men too. We ask, where would your Watts and Boltons be, if it were not for them? Why, it is they—it is the men of poetical genius—who build your steamboats and steamcoaches. The man of genius is not now merely a scrawler on paper, a writer of poems or of tales; but his pen is become a magician's wand, the most potent one that was ever wielded: and, while other men think that he is merely inditing some pleasant lay, or matter for a winter-evening's fireside, they who see farther into a millstone know that he is actually building ships and boats, steamengines and steamcarriages; launching new and splendid packets; laying down railroads, and carrying them through mountain and forest; erecting inns, furnishing them with hosts, and guests, and waiters; spreading tables with every delicacy of the season—as witness, ye grouse on many a heathery hill, ye herrings of Loch Fine, and salmon of countless lochs, and rivers running like silver from the mountains—spreading them for thousands who run to and fro in the earth, not merely increasing knowledge of one another, but the good luck of landlords, and the employment of whole troops of poor and deserving men. The man of genius does this, and more: he creates joint-stock companies, he invests large capitals, he makes captains and stewards of steamers, clerks, coachmen, and sailors—these, and many other creatures after their kind, are of his creation.

Does any one doubt it? Why, Sir Walter Scott has done more than this, of his single arm. See what he has done for Scotland. See every summer, and all summer long, what thousands pour into that beautiful country, exploring every valley, climbing every mountain, skilling on every frith and loch, and spreading themselves and their money all through the land. And what roads and steamvessels, what cars and coaches, are prepared for them! what inns are erected!—and yet not half enough!—so rapidly does the spirit of the poetical and picturesque spread—so wonderfully do the numbers of its votaries increase, seeking a little easement of their swollen purses, a little outlet for all their taste and enthusiasm. No less than nine hundred persons, on a daily average, pass through the single city of Glasgow, chiefly of this class of persons, set astray by this great spirit which has of late years sprung up, the work of our poets and romancers. In summer all the inns there are filled jam-full; trains of omnibusses, or omnibis, are flying down to the Broomielaw every hour, to discharge the contents of the inns into the steamers, and return with the living cargoes of the steamers to the inns. Every hour, the bell of some packet, bound to the Highlands, the Western Isles, Ireland, Wales, and all such places, attractive as the very land of the Genii to poetical imaginations, is heard ringing out its call to the picturesque and pleasure-hunters; and that call is obeyed by swarms of eager tourists, to the height of all human astonishment.

And when did all this grow up? "Oh," say the mere mechanic heads, "why, when steam created such facilities." Yes, since the steam of poetic brains created it! Where would your steamboats and your railroads have been leading us, do you think, if Bishop Percy had not collected the glorious ballads of nature and of heroism that were scattered over Scotland and England—the leaves of a new Sybil a million times more fateful and pregnant with wonders than the old; if Bishop Percy had not done this, and set on fire the kindred heads of Southey, of Wordsworth, and of Scott; if the Border Minstrelsy had not been gathered by Scott; if ballads and eclogues of a new school, if poems full of a pensive beauty and a pure love, had not been framed by Southey; if Wordsworth had not—stricken, as he confesses, by the mighty power of nature through this very medium—gone wandering all over the mountains of Cumberland, filling his heart with the life of the hills, and the soul of the over-arching heavens, and the peace or passion of human existence hidden in glens and recesses where poets had ceased to look for them; if the first of these great men had not come forth again in a fresh character, with Metrical Romances, and with Historical Romances in prose, pouring a new spirit through field and forest; bringing down from the mountains of the North a clan life, and race of fiery warriors, with their pride, their superstitions, their bloody quarrels, their magnanimity of mutual devotion and fatal loyalty, such as we should otherwise never have known; and, besides this, peopling mountain and glen, palace and cottage, garrison and town, with a host of characters which live and move before us, as if they were not the offspring of a mortal brain, but of the earth and the heavens themselves? I say, where would these steamboats and railroads now have been leading their passengers? Why, dully enough, to the market—to purchase cottons and printed calicoes in Glasgow, Paisley, and Manchester; ashes and indigo in Liverpool; teas, and a thousand other things in London. They would be going, not the packhorse, but the railroad round of dull and wearisome commerce, wearing out its own soul by its over-draggery; and, even of these, there would not have been a tithe of the present outgoers. But now, the soul which has been crushed under the weight of daily duty, has felt a spark of this great spirit, has felt an indefinable impulse, which is, in fact, the nascent love of nature and of out-of-door liberty; and, in the summer months, the weavers and spinners, the thumpers and bumpers, the grinders and shearers, the slaves of the desk, the warehouse, the bank, and the shop, leap up, and issue forth—as bear witness Sir George Head—by hundreds, and by thousands, in all directions, for a pleasure that their fathers, poor old fellows! never dreamed of on the most auspicious night of their lives. O boats, whether on canal or river, driven by steam or drawn by horse! O ships, on loch, or frith, or ocean, propelled by engines of three hundred horse power! cabs and cars, omnibis and stages, inns and lodging-houses, wayside rests and fishing taverns, Tom and Jerries, Tillysnes or Kidley-Winks! bear ye witness to the tribes set on fire by this Walter Scott, these poets, and even these naturalists—Bewick, Walton, Gilbert White, and that class of quiet agitators—tribes who have gone forth, to scramble up hills, and tumble down them, to sport parasols amongst frightened sheep, and scream on precipices, that they may fall into the arms of careful lovers; to eat beef-steaks, and drink ginger-beer and soda-water, with open windows, and under trees, in boats or in booths—bear witness all of you in all quarters of these islands! Let us hear no more about the poets not being practical men: they are the men practical and promotive of public wealth and activity; they are your true political economists, your diffusers of the circulating medium; in fact, your ship-builders, house-builders, smiths, black, white, or copper; your tailors and clothiers, your very hosts, cads, waiters, and grooms—for, to all these, they give not merely employment, but life and being itself.

And yet, it is a curious fact that the poets and the mechanists struck out into a new and bolder line together; that this new growth and outburst of intellect and ideality, this revival in the world of mind, indicated its presence at once in the imaginative and the constructive crania. It is curious that steam, mechanism, and poetry, should have been brought simultaneously to bear in so extraordinary a degree on the public spirit and character. The love of poetry and nature, of picturesque scenery and summer-wandering, no sooner were generated by the means I have here stated, than lo! steamers appeared at the quays, and railroads projected their iron lines over hill and dale. Impulse was given at the same moment to the public heart, and facility to yield to it. Had the one appeared without the other, there must have been felt a painful restraint, an uncomprehended but urgent want. Had the poetic spirit come alone, it would have lacked wings to fly to the mountains and the ocean shores. Had the mechanic impetus arisen without this, it would have wanted employment for its full energies. Their advent was coincident; and their present effect is amazing, and their future one, a matter of wild speculation and wonder.

But there is yet another feature of this subject that is worthy of notice; and that is, how cunningly our great masters have gone to work. Call them dreaming and improvident! It is the most absurd abuse of language ever committed. There is no class of men more notorious for saving and care-taking than that of your great geniuses. Accordingly, as we go through the country, propelled in the human tide by the double power of poetry and steam, what

is one of the first facts that seizes on your attention? Why, the ingenuity and tact with which these thoughtless poets and air-dreaming romancers have laid hold not only of the most glorious subjects, but the most glorious scenes. They know that, next to a popular theme, is the popular allocation of it—and what beautiful spot is there now, from Land's End to John O'Groat's—what spot known for its loveliness, or sacred for its history, or made mysteriously interesting by traditions—on which they have not seized? The monks were said, of old, to have pounced upon all the paradisiacal valleys and rich nooks of the country; but the poets have pounced upon them now. The ancients were accused of having robbed us of all our fine thoughts and spirit-stirring topics; but the modern poets having taken away our very mountains and cattle-fields, our fairy haunts and our waters, lying under the beautifying lights and shades of love, and heroism, and sorrow. They have preoccupied them before our very eyes. There is nothing which has impressed me so much with the prescience and deep sagacity of our great modern geniuses as the care with which they have perched themselves on every pleasant nook and knoll all over the land. Every spot of interest has this Scott, this Wordsworth, or this Campbell appropriated—and who does not admire their policy? The grandeur and intellectuality of a subject may, of themselves, give it a great charm; but it is better to have two strings to your bow—a subject noble and beautiful in itself linked to noble and beautiful scenery; not confined to the library or the fireside book, but thrown, as it were, in the way of the public, cast before the summer wanderers, where natural beauty and traditional romance exert a double influence. What a fine effect it has, both for poet and reader, when, as you stop to admire some lovely landscape, some sublimity of mountain or seashore, you hear it said—"This is the scenery of Marmion—this is the Castle of Ellangowan—this is the spot where Helen M'Gregor gave her celebrated breakfast—here fought Bailey Nicol Jarvie with his red-hot ploughshare—this is Lammermuir—or this is Atonish Hall." What a charm and a glory suddenly invest the place! How deep sinks the strain of the bard or the romancer into your soul! The adroitness with which great names have thus been written—not on perishable paper, but on every rock and mountain of the land—is admirable.—Howitt.

STATISTICS.

The condition of the young people employed in factories was, a few years ago, the subject of many pathetic statements in the House of Commons and elsewhere, from which it was made to appear, that through the severity of their labours, they were deprived of nature's fair proportions, and ushered into mature life (when they survived so far) a miserably stunted race of beings, threatening to produce a wide-spread degeneracy. As long as figures of speech had been permitted to reign, these statements would have passed current, and the public mind would have received them as truth. But what said figures of arithmetic? When the royal commissioners, appointed for the purpose, began to inquire into the real state of the case, instead of contenting themselves with a mere ocular survey of the factory children, they resolved to subject them to a test which could not err. They resolved to weigh and measure them. They took factory boys and girls from various places, the former to the number of 410, and the latter 652, and a large but lesser number of children of both sexes not employed in factories; and, on weighing and measuring the one against the other, they found that there was scarcely any difference in either respect between the two sets of children.

The average weight of a number of boys and girls employed in factories between the ages of nine and seventeen, was for the former 75.175 pounds, for the latter 74.049: the average weight of an equal number of boys and girls of the same ages, not labouring in factories, was for the former 78.680, the latter 75.049. The average stature in inches of a number of factory boys and girls was, respectively, 55.282 and 54.951, while the average stature of an equal number of non-factory children at the same ages, was, respectively, 55.563 and 54.971.

Amongst the common notions respecting a manufacturing as contrasted with an agricultural population, no one is more universally prevalent, or more readily received, than that the former are much more addicted to crime than the latter. When figures are resorted to, the very reverse appears to be the truth. In 1830, the proportion of thieves in the county of Edinburgh, a rural district containing a large non-manufacturing city, was as 1 to 1462 of the population, while the proportion in the manufacturing counties of Lanark and Renfrew was as only 1 in 2097. In non-manufacturing Sweden, the proportion of criminals is as five to one of what it is in manufacturing England. Another prevalent notion, respecting crime is, that want is its chief prompting cause. This is also an error. Of a thousand criminals confined in Preston jail between October 1832 and July 1837, and into whose cases the chaplain made the most minute investigations, "want and distress" were alleged to be the prompting causes of the offence, even by the parties themselves, in only 76 instances. It may be added that "idleness and bad company" were the causes in 88 instances, and "drunkenness" in no fewer than 455, or nearly half of the whole.

It was long believed that consumption (phthisis pulmonalis) was