

Eminent Literary Ladies.

For the Calliopean.

No. 6.

Miss Letitia Elizabeth Landon.

L. E. L. in the poetical, like Junius in the political world, has become a name of itself, which shall last to the end of time. How thrilling must have been the interest excited by these three simple letters, as pieces of the most touching beauty regularly appeared, for several years, in the "Literary Gazette," with this signature, and found an eager welcome in almost every household in England. She was but eighteen years of age, (she was born in 1802,) when her productions were shown to Mr. Jerdan, the editor of this paper, and the friend and neighbor of her father, who immediately perceived their ability and placed them before the public. About two years afterwards her father died, and henceforth, like Mrs. Hemans after her separation from her husband, she devoted every energy of her mind, with the most unceasing industry, to the support of her surviving relatives.

The Improvisatrice, the Troubadour, the Golden Violet, the Venetian Bracelet, and the Vow of the Peacock, appeared in succession, and in consequence of her previous fame met with the most encouraging success. These works are all characterized by an enthusiastic fondness for the heroes of chivalry and romance, which seem to have taken a strong hold upon her imagination, and form the theme of most of her poetical writings. The scenes and events which she brings before the reader, are described with a gorgeousness of coloring, a vividness of thought, and, at the same time, a beauty of language, which makes them irresistibly fascinating, especially to the young. As she grew older, however, she acquired greater depth and correctness of thought; though her own peculiar "rhythm, feeling, style, and phraseology," which are so easily distinguishable from those of all other poets, are the same in all her writings. In the words of one of her own characters: "I am far cleverer than I was. I have felt, have thought so much. Talk of the mind exhausting itself!—never! Think of the mass of materials, which every day accumulates! Then experience, with its calm, clear light, corrects so many youthful fallacies; every day we feel our higher moral responsibility, and our greater power."

But when she had already gained a lofty niche in the temple of Poetry, she suddenly, like Sir Walter Scott, entered the lists for prose composition. Francesca Carrara, and Ethel Churchill, if fictions are to be approved at all, are among the finest in our language. The Traits and Trials of Early Life, founded upon reality, and somewhat upon events in her own life, is powerfully as well as affectingly written. Well do we remember weeping bitterly over the misfortunes and cruel treatment of two orphan children, portrayed in one of these sketches, entitled the Twin Sisters. Her prose productions possess nearly the same characteristics as her poetry, affording, perhaps, a greater scope for her benevolent and searching views of society; though it is a remarkable fact, but one probably true of most real poets, that she found much greater facility in expressing herself in verse, than in prose.

In 1831 she became editress of Fisher's Drawing-room Scrap Book, which continued under her able direction till her marriage, in 1838.

From her childhood, Africa had been a place of intense interest to her imaginative mind; arising, in part, perhaps, from the fact, that, when very young, she had read a book of travels in that country, and in part, from the circumstance of her father and cousin having visited it. This was, perhaps, one of the reasons which induced her to be united to Mr. Maclean, and go out to Cape Coast Castle, of which he was governor. She was in the full bloom of her age, and her fame, when she thus resigned the enjoyments of English society, to reside in a solitary castle on the shores of the African continent. She had been there, however, but a short time, when a dose of poison, unfortunately taken by mistake, put an end to the existence of this "highly-gifted songstress."

Born, and living the greater part of her life in London, she

became linked to its tastes and habits. Reveling in its brightest and most intellectual circles, her brilliant thoughts gained her the admiration, as much as did her goodness of heart, the love of all with whom she associated. The spirit of indwelling joyousness, which seemed to fill her, when but a child, with "a little world of happiness within," and which prompted the answer, when rambling at that age through the garden, "oh don't speak to me, I have such a delightful thought in my head," continued the same through every period of her life. As happy among the gloomy rocks, and ignorant inhabitants of the Gold Coast, as amid the gaudy of the British metropolis, she wrote homo a letter, the morning before she took the fatal draught, breathing the same cheerfulness and vivacity as ever.

"Your first impressions of her," says William Howitt, "were—what a light, simple, merry-looking girl. If you had not been aware of her being a popular poetess, you would have suspected her of being nothing more than an agreeable, bright, and joyous young lady. This feeling in her own house, or among a few congenial people, was quickly followed by a feeling of the kind-heartedness and goodness about her. You felt that you could not be long with her without loving her. There was a frankness and generosity about her that won extremely upon you."

It was, probably, this lightness and independence of spirit, which gave rise to many calumnies, which were totally untrue, but which often destroyed her peace of mind. It was, doubtless, one of these calumnies which spread abroad the supposition that her death was intentional. She certainly was wanting (and it is the greatest defect in her character), in that heavenly-mindedness, and that piety, which Mrs. Hemans learnt from so many lessons of suffering.

The character of her writings is, in one respect, strikingly different from the general cast of her mind. A dreary melancholy seems to pervade them all. Love is the subject of most of them, but it is a love, which always ends in disappointment and wretchedness. The words of her first heroine are applicable to them all, and seem singularly characteristic of her own destiny:—

"Sad were my shades; methinks they had
Almost a tone of prophecy—
I over had, from earliest youth,
A feeling what my fate would be."

JUNIA.

Results of Astronomy.

ACCORDING to a conjecture first made by the great Herschel, and afterwards further developed and rendered intelligible by Madler, the entire system of fixed stars forms, if we may use the expression, a single less-shaped canopy. That is, we, with our sun are situated nearly in the middle of a space, having the form of two watch glasses, placed with the concave surfaces towards each other. The surfaces of this canopy are studded tolerably equally with fixed stars. But as we are a thousand times nearer those situated above and below than those at the edges of this hollow lens, so the distances between the stars immediately above us seem greater, whilst the legions of those distributed at the edge are seen in densely crowded masses. We may consider the Milky Way as the edge and furthest limit of this set of fixed stars, where the infinitely distant crowds of stars are collected in such masses, that their light grows together into a whitish cloud, and no longer permits us to isolate one star from another.

Beyond this our lens, Herschel and the most recent astronomers imagine that the spots of clouds which appear like oval flakes in the sky, are other entirely distinct and independent systems, which float at such an immeasurable distance from us that the light has to wander millions of years in reaching us.

It is, however, as we before remarked, sufficient for our purpose to take into consideration only the stars of the twelfth magnitude, from which the light can travel to us in four thousand years. From what we have already said, viz., that the ray of light meeting our eye is not sent forth from the star at the same moment, but arrives here according to the corresponding and requisite number of seconds, minutes, or years, it follows that we do not see the star as it is, but it was at the time when the ray of light was emitted.