

Eminent Literary Ladies.

No. 5.

For the Calliopean.

Mrs. Felicia D. Hemans.

It is one of the highest offices of poetry to give utterance to the deep feelings of the heart—to "hold the mirror up" to man, as well as to nature. The power of seizing, as it were, and laying bare the workings of sorrow, affliction, compassion, pride and anger in the human breast, is possessed only by the mightiest intellects, such as Shakespeare, Dante, and Milton; yet, it is also found in an inferior degree, in a large class of female writers, who have arisen during the last century, and whose intensity of feeling and tenderness of soul have peculiarly fitted them for portraying the more amiable passions of the heart. At the head of these is Mrs. Hemans. Born at Liverpool, in 1794, she was ever an imaginative, fanciful being, giving vent to her thoughts in verse, from the time she was eight years of age. Her early marriage with Captain Hemans, first broke in, alas! too rudely, upon the pleasing revery of her life. An enthusiastic devotee of literature, her only delight was to feast on the works of genius, or revel in the regions of imagination; while her husband, on the contrary, was of a worldly, "utilitarian" disposition. There was no sympathy of soul or congeniality of taste between them, and at length a separation took place. She retired with her five children, to the residence of her mother, in South Wales, where she devoted herself to study and the composition of her poems.

The elegance and taste displayed in some of her first productions, gained for her the acquaintance of Bishop Heber; who, doubtless, had a great influence in turning her attention to more serious subjects. Her various works were given in rapid succession to the public; with whom, however, their depth of feeling and beauty of style, secured for them an enthusiastic reception. In 1820, she removed to the vicinity of Liverpool, in order to enjoy the greater literary facilities which that place afforded; but, though now in the zenith of her fame, she spent her time as much as possible in retirement.

About a year after her settlement here, she made a visit to Scotland, which greatly extended the circle of her literary acquaintance. Her stay at Abbotsford, and impressions of Sir Walter Scott, are thus described by herself—"With him I am now in constant intercourse; taking long walks over moor and woodland, and listening to song and legend of other times, till my mind forgets itself, and is carried wholly back to the days of the Slogan and the fiery cross, and the wide gathering of Border chivalry. I cannot say enough of his cordial kindness to me: it makes me feel, when at Abbotsford, as if the stately rooms of that ancestral-looking place were old familiar scenes to me. We passed one meadow, on which Sir Walter's grandfather had been killed in a duel! 'Had it been a century earlier,' he said, 'a bloody feud would have been transmitted, as Spaniards bequeath a game of chess to their children.' The whole expression of his benevolent countenance changes, if he has but to speak of the dirk or the claymore: you see the spirit that would say amidst the trumpets, ha! ha! suddenly flashing from his grey eyes; and sometimes, in repeating a verse of warlike minstrelsy, he will spring up as if he caught the sound of a distant gathering cry."

She likewise spent a few weeks with Wordsworth, in the north of England, in a manner equally pleasant. "I am charmed with Mr. Wordsworth, whose kindness to me has quite a soothing influence over my spirits. There is a daily beauty in his life; which is in such lovely harmony with his poetry, that I am thankful to have witnessed and felt it. He gives me a great deal of his society; reads to me, walks with me, leads my pony when I ride, and I begin to talk with him quite as with a sort of paternal friend."

After living three years at Liverpool, she removed to Dublin to enable her elder sons to complete their education, but the delicate state of her health, with which she had suffered for some time, at length brought her existence to a close about three years after her removal, on the 16th of May, 1833. Her death was cheered by that heavenly plenty, which throws such a distin-

ing charm over her writings. A few days before her death, she wrote a sonnet on the Sabbath, of which the following is a part:

"And the hamlet low,
With whose thick orchard-blossoms the soft winds play,
Send out their inmates in a happy flow,
Like a freed vernal stream. I may not tread
With them those pathways—to the feverish bed
Of sickness bound:—yet, oh my God! I bless
Thy mercy, that with Sabbath peace hath filled
My chastened heart, and all its throbbings stilled
To one deep calm of lowliest thankfulness."

Her numerous pieces are characterised by a loftiness of feeling, a purity of sentiment, and an elegance of diction, which entitle them to a high rank in English literature. Her acquaintance with ancient literature, gave her a classical taste, while her fondness for the great masters of Spain and Germany, conferred depth and originality of thought. Endlessly diversified as are her subjects, embracing the whole compass of nature, there is not a verse in which is not found some elevated sentiment—some truly womanly feeling. Witness the following:

MOTHER'S LOVE.

There is none
In all this cold and hollow world, no fount
Of deep, strong, deathless love, save that within
A mother's heart.—It is but pride, where-with
To his fair son the father's eye doth turn,
Watching his growth. Ay, on the boy he looks,
The bright glad creature springing in his path,
But as the heir of his great name, the young
And stately tree, whose rising strength ere long
Shall bear his well.—And this is love!
This is man's love!—What marvel?—you ne'er made
Your breast the pillow of his infancy,
While to the fulness of your heart's glad heavings
His fair cheeks rose and fell; and his bright hair
Waved softly to your breast!—You ne'er kept watch
Beside him, all the last pale star had set,
And morn, all dawning, as in triumph, broke
On your dim weary eye; not yours the face
Which early faded through fond care for him,
Hung o'er his sleep, and duly as Heaven's light,
Was there to greet his waking! You ne'er smoothed
His couch, ne'er sung him to his rosy rest,
Caught his least whisper, when his voice from yours
Had learned soft utterance; pressed your lip to his
When fever parched it; hushed his wayward cries,
With patient, vigilant, never-weary love!
No! these are woman's tasks!—In these her youth,
And bloom of cheek, and buoyancy of heart,
Seal from her all unmarked!

A seraphic glow of devotion animates her poetry, and gives it a pure and ethereal spirit. Severely tried in the furnace of affliction, she learned to place her dearest hopes, and utter her loftiest strains, on the blessedness of a brighter world.

Another excellence of her writings is, that though most of them are short pieces, including an immense variety of subjects, she never indulges in a sickly sentimentalism. Deprive the poems of Thomas Moore of everything of this character, and what would be left? Many of her occasional pieces are exceedingly touching and beautiful. Her "Casabianca," "Tyrolean Evening Song," and "Homes of England," rival even the far-famed lyrics of her friend, Thomas Campbell. JUNIA.

Bodily Exercise in Early Life.

TO FETTER the active motions of children, as soon as they have acquired the use of their limbs, is barbarous opposition of improving their minds and manners, is an insult to common sense. It may, indeed, be the way to train up elevated puppets for short-lived prodigies of learning; but never to form healthy, well-informed and accomplished men and women. Every feeling individual must behold, with much heart-felt concern, poor little puny creatures of eight, ten, or twelve years of age exhibited by their silly parents as proficient in learning, or as distinguished for their early proficiency in language, elocution, music, or even some frivolous acquirement. The strength of the mind, as well as the body is exhausted, and the natural growth of both is checked by such untimely exertions.