

Thistledown Frae Scotland.

(Contributed.)
THE SCOTTISH TONGUE.
 No man, it is well known, had ever more command of the native vernacular than Robert Burns. In a letter written at Carlisle, in June, 1787, to his friend William Nicol, Minister of the High School, Edinburgh, he has a curious testimony as to the possibilities of the language and his own skill in it. "Kind, honest-hearted Willie," he writes, "I'm sittin doon here, after seven-and-forty miles' ridin', e'en as forjeskit and forniaw'd as a forfoughten cock, to gie you some notion o' my land-lower-like stravagin' sin' the sorrowfu' hour that I shuck hands and parted. wi' Auld Reekie. My auld ga'd sleyde o' a meere has huckall'd up hill and down brae in Scotland and England, as tetch and birlie as a vera devil wi' me. It's true, she's as puir's a sang-maker, an' as hard's a Kirk, and tipper talpers when she tak's the gate, jist like a lady's gentlewoman in a minnow, or a hen on a hot gir-die; but she's a yauld, poutherie gir-ran for a' that, and has a stomach like Willie Stalker's meere, that wad has digested tumbler-wheels, for she'll whip me off her five stimparts o' the best aits at a doon-sitten, and ne'er fash her throom. When once her ring-banes and spuries, her crucks and cramps are fairly coupl'd, she beets to, beets to, and aye the hindmost hour the tightest. I could wagger her price to a threety pennies, that for twa or three weeks, ridin' at fifty miles a day, the deil-stickit a five galloper's acquiesh Clyde and Withorn could cast saut on her tail. I ha' dander'd ower a' the country frae Dunbar to Selkirk, and ha'e forger'd wi' mony a gude fellow, and mony a weel-faur'd hizzie. I met wi' twa dink queynes in particular. Ane o' them, a sonesie, fine, fodelg lass, baith brav and bonnie, the other was a clean-shankit, straight, tight, weel-faur'd wench, as blythe's a linwhite on a flowerie thorn, and as sweet and modest's a new blawn plum—rose in a hazel shaw. They were baith bred to mainners by the beuk and ony ane o' them had as muckle smeddum and rumble gumpion as the half o' some Presbyteries that you and I baith ken. They played me sic a dell o' a shavie, that I daur say if my hairgals were turn'd out ye wad see twa nicks i' the heart o' me like the mark o' a kail-whittle in a castock. I was gawn to write you a lang pyste, but, gude forgi'e me, I sat myself sae noutoriously hiltichy'd the day, after kail-time, than I can hardly stouter but and ben. My best respects to the guld wife and a' our common friends, especially Mr. and Mrs. Cruickshank, and the honest guidman o' Jock's Lodge. I'll be in Dumfries the morn gif the beast be to the fore, and the branks bide ha'e. Gude be wi' you, Willie! Amen!"

That letter might fairly be made the shibboleth in any case of doubt regarding one's ability to read Scotch. It would shiver the front teeth of some of your counterlopering gentry. Yet it is not an overdone example of Scotch Doric as it was spoken in Edinburgh drawing-rooms a hundred years ago—Vide, Henry Cockburn's Memorials. Between it and the "braids Scotch" of half a century earlier there is a marked difference.

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certain Adam Scott, in Upper Dales. Thus Scott prayed for a son who seemed thoughtless. "For thy purr, shawl servants that are now addressing Thee in their ain shilly-shally way, and for the sake o' mair than we daur weel name to Thee, ha'e mercy on Rob. Ye ken fu' weel he's a wild, mischievous callant, and thinks nae mair o' committin' sin than a dog does o' lickin a dish; but put thy book in his nose, and thy bridle in his gab, and gar him come back to Thee wi' a jerk that he'll no forget the longest day that he has to live." For another son he prayed: "Dinna forget puir Jamie, wha's fur awa' frae us this night. Keep thy arm o' power about him, and oh, I wish ye wad endow him wi' a little spunk and amedum to act for himself; for, if ye dinna, he'll be but a hunchie i' this ward, and a back-sitter i' the nest." Again: "We're a' like hawks, we're a' like snails, we're a' like slegie riddies; like hawks to do evil, like snails to go good, and like slegie riddies to let through a' the gude and keep a' the bad." When Napoleon I was filling Europe with alarm, he prayed: "Bring down the tyrant and his lang neb, for he has done muckle ill this year, and gie him a cup o' Thy wrath, and gin he winna tak' that, gie him kelly." (i.e. double, or two cups.) Very graphic, is it not? It reminds us of the prayer of one Jamie Hamilton, a celebrated poacher in the West Country. As Jamie was reconnoitring a lonely situation one morning, his mind more set on hares than on prayers, a woman approached him from the only house in the immediate district and requested that he should "come ower and pray for auld Eppie, for she's fast deelin'."

"Ye ken weel enough that I can pray nae," replied Jamie. "But we haena time to rin for ony ither, Jamie," urged the woman. "Eppie's jist slippin' awa', and oh! it wad be an awfu' like thing to lat the puir bodie dee wi'out bein' prayer for."

"Weel, then," said Jamie, "an' I maun come, but I'm sure I kenna right what to say."

The occasion has ever so much to do with the man. Approaching the bed, Jamie doffed his cap and proceeded: "O Lord, Thou kens best Thy naimel' how the case stands between Thee and auld Eppie; an' sin' Ye ha'e baith the heft and the blade in yer main hand, jist guide the gully, a' best suits her guld and yer naim glory, Amen." It was a poacher's prayer in very truth, but a bishop could not have said more in as few words.

But if it is easy to be expressive in Scotch, for it is peculiar to the West

idiom that the simpler the language employed the effect is the greater. Think how this is manifested in the song and ballad literature of the country. In popular ballads like "Gill Morrice," "Sir James the Rose," "Barbara Allan," and "The Dowie Dens o' Yarrow," in Jane Elliot's song of "The Flowers of the Forest," in Grizel Ballie's "Werna my heart licht I wad dee"; in Lady Lindsay's "Auld Robin Gray"; in Lady Nairne's "Land o' the Leal"; in Burns's "Auld Lang Syne"; in Tannahill's "Gloomy Winter"; in Thomson's "Mitherless Bairn"; and in Smibert's "Widow's Lament." I do not mean to say that the making of these songs and ballads was a simple matter, but the verbal material is in each case of the simplest character, and the effect such that the pieces are established in the common heart of Scotland.

Burns did not go out of his way for either language or figures of speech to describe Willie Wastie's wife. Yet

see the graphic picture we have presented to us by a few strokes of his pen—

"She has an e'e—she has but ane, The cat has twa the very colour; Five rusty teeth, forbye a stump, A clapper-tongue wad dave a miller. A whiskin beard about her mou; Her nose and chin they threaten ither—"

Sic a wife as Willie has, I wadna gie a button for her.

She's bow-houghed, she's hein-skin'd, As limpin' leg, a hand-breed shorter, She's twisted right, she's twisted left, To balance fair in lika quarter. She has a hump upon her breast, The twin o' that upon her shoulther— Sic a wife as Willie has, I wadna gie a button for her."

No idea there is strained. Every word is common. The same may be said of Hew Ainslie's lyric poem in a different view, "Dowie in the hint o' Halrast," which I make no apology for quoting in full—

"It's dowie in the hint o' halrast, At the wa'-gang o' the swallow, When the wind grove cold, and the burrs grow baird, and the An' the wuds are hingin' yellow; But oh! it's dowie far to see The wa'-gang o' her the heart gangs wi'—"

The dead-set o' a shinnin' e'e, That dargens the weary warld on thee. There was meikle love atween us twa Oh, twa could ne'er be forger; And the thing on yind was never made That could ha'e gart us sunder. But the way o' Heaven's aboon a' ken, And we maun bear what it likes to see—"

It's comfort, though, to weary men, That the worst o' this warld's waes maun ee."

There's mony things that come and gae, Just kent, and just forgotten; And the flowers that buck a bonnie brae, Gin anither year lie rotten. But the last look o' yon lovely e'e, And the deenlin' grip she ga'e to me, They're settled like eternitie— Oh, Mary, gin I were wi' thee."

SUITABLE WORK.

How happy is the man whose task has all the charm he'd dare to ask! He spent the long hours chasing rats or pasting hair on wooden cats, all day he teeters to and fro, and when at eve the whistles blow, he sighs and says, "So help me, John, the happy day's already gone! How sad that one must quit his chores to sleep the night in useless snores! I grudge each hour that bids me rest, and leave the tasks that I love the best!" Oh, work is better far than play to any

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WELL, IS HE GETTING NO BETTER?

YEAH, HE'S GETTIN' NO BETTER, FAST!

IS HIS ILLNESS CONTAGIOUS, BILLY?

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