

A NEW BOOK OF SCOTTISH POETRY.*

Perhaps in all the wide range which poetry takes, whether in the form of sonnet, ballad, lyric or idyl measure, the poetry of nature and of the emotions belongs eminently to Scotland alone. France through Alfred DeMussét has given us lays of a tender sympathetic chord and Germany in her Goethe has occasionally deigned to paint a lowly Rhineland home, but Norway, Hungary, Switzerland, Spain and other great poetic countries of Europe have deemed it more fit to portray the stirring deeds of battle in ponderous hexameters and high sounding lyrics than to sketch in quiet mellifluous verse, the less ambitious theme of peasant cottages and homely villagers. What poem in a foreign tongue can compare with Burns's simple exemplification of the Presbyterian faith, "A Cotter's Saturday Night," and where shall we find a tenderer or more tearful poem to touch the heart, than that charming fugitive wanderer, nameless and alone, "The Puir Raggit Wean?" There is so much genuine feeling, so much to awaken sympathetic action in our bosoms, so much genial warmth thrown round hallowed firesides, so much *naturalness* in all Scottish poetry that one always feels better after reading it, his own home is better appreciated and his heart feels warmer towards his fellow man in consequence. England in her poets seeks not the amelioration of the lot of the poor farmer, toiling in his field. Wordsworth, perhaps, in his *Mendicant* rouses a heavy lethargic heart, long hidden in the lap of selfishness, to yield to the importunities of one of our less favoured brethren, but the old hard heart turns and sleeps again. And we all know how soundly the Lake poet was rated by the critics and how scathingly he was "hit off" by Byron for his "new departure" in poesy. Hood is almost alone in his tales of "one more unfortunate," and his "Song of the Shirt" lives in our hearts merely because it is a tale of the heart, and striking deeply into our sensibilities retains its place there. Ireland's Tom Moore, the sweet singer, may be an exception, though there is doubt in placing him in this category. He seems to have devoted his more serious attention to the translations from Anacreon, and beyond *Lalla Rookh* we have little of a pastoral tendency. The *Harp that once through Tara's Halls* is only musical at best and calls up no responsive answer. Lover is only a pleasant singer and has produced nothing, in a poetic sense, to compare with Burns's great rival, Paisley's tuneful lyrist, Robert Tannahill. What a fine tribute of a more exalted love is his "Filial Vow:"

"Why heaves my mother oft the deep-drawn sigh?
 Why starts the big tear glistening in her eye?
 Why oft retire to hide her bursting grief?
 Why seeks she not, nor seems to wish relief?
 'Tis for my father, mouldering with the dead,
 My brother, in bold manhood, lowly laid,

* POEMS AND SONGS BY WM. MURDOCH, St. John, N. B.: J. & A. McMillan.