

greater justice would have been done to the venerable bard of Selma.

It was in 1773 that Johnson paid his well-known visit to the Hebrides. Any candid reader of his "Tour in the Hebrides" will admit, that he spoke very disparagingly of the civilization of the Highlands. His narrative indicates that he was prejudiced, and therefore unfitted for acting the part of an impartial critic. At any rate, his stay was of very short duration, and the knowledge which he could gather must have been very inaccurate. "Of the Gaelic language," he says, "as I understood nothing, I cannot say more than I have been told: it is the rude speech of a barbarous people, who had few thoughts to express, and were content, as they conceived grossly, to be grossly understood. Five hundred lines cannot be recovered in the whole Erse language of which there is any evidence that they are a hundred years old. They, i.e., the inhabitants of the Highlands, have enquired and considered little, and do not always feel their ignorance. They are not much accustomed to be interrogated by others, and seem never to have thought upon interrogating themselves; so that if they do not know what they tell to be true, they likely do not perceive it to be false." For the hospitality with which he was treated by the Highland lairds and ministers, Johnson made a very sorry requital. The Dean of Lismore's Book, to which reference has been already made, clearly refutes the objection that no poem existed which was a hundred years old. The disparaging remarks of Johnson respecting the ignorance and untruthfulness of the Highlanders could proceed only from strong dislike and preconceived opinions. I have heard a gentleman recite a Gaelic poem in which Johnson is ridiculed in very severe terms. Though this satire is couched in very elegant language, I have never been able to see it in print. Owing, however, to the lofty position occupied by Johnson in the literary world, his very unfavourable deliverance could not fail to have an injurious effect on the poems of Ossian.

Laing, the historian, was also a determined opponent of the poems of Ossian. He accused MacPherson of plagiarism, and had recourse to very ingenious arguments to make this accusation valid. He took unwarrantable advantage of certain concessions made by MacPherson. "MacPherson," he says, "has acknowledged from the beginning the deceit. 'It would be a very uncommon example of self-denial in me to disown them, were they really of my composition.'" The plau-