

## MODERN SCOTTISH POETRY.\*

Why is it that beyond any literature in the world, except, perhaps, that of Germany, Scottish literature is rich in stirring verse, tender ballads and humorous or pathetic poems? Many of these have been current for generations, passing from lip to lip, till Percy, and Scott, and Motherwell gathered into the store-house of books much of this minstrelsy of the Scottish border. And in more recent times every parish has had its poet—almost every village its native bard, many of them of humble birth—“wabsters and souters,” crofters and herdsman, and lowly toilers at the plough or loom. In no country in the world, we venture to say, could four such stout and well-filled volumes as these, and of such average excellence, be gleaned, but in the fertile fields of Scottish poesy.

In an admirable essay the editor of these volumes answers our initial question. Some of its points we will briefly note. While the epic poetry of England, the product of her Miltons, and Drydens, her Tennysons and Brownings, is so rich, her peasant poetry is very scant and poor. The reason assigned for this is, that while the Scottish peasantry have for centuries been educated, the English peasant has been neglected, and too often left sunk in ignorance. John Knox, in planting a school in every parish, and a Bible in every school, did more for his country than he dreamed. The deep religious instincts of the nation, the fervour of the Covenanters, the piety of its peasant saints, blossomed forth in religious poetry. The patriotic feelings of the people, too, were fostered and inflamed by the long contest with their conquerors, and by the very sternness and sublimity of mountain and crag, no less than by the loveliness of wimpling burn, and bonnie brae. In the land of Wallace, Bruce, and Burns,

No brook may pass along,  
Or hillock rise, without its song.

A hasty run through some of Scotland's fairest and grandest scenes impressed this vividly upon our mind. Almost every stream and vale, every crag and ruin, had its poetic associations.

The tenderness of the Scottish muse is especially seen in its incomparable love-songs and poems of the home affections. The very words fall from the lips like a caress—soft as the Italian, as flexible, and full of meaning as the Greek.

The gude auld honest mither tongue !  
They kent nae ither, auld or young ;  
Weel could it a' oor wants express,  
Weel could it ban, weel could it bless ,  
Wi' a' oor feelin's 'twas acquint,  
Had words for pleasour an' complent ;  
Was sweet to hear in sacred psalm,  
In simmer Sabbath mornin's calm ;  
An' at the family exercise,  
When auld gudemen, on bended knees,  
Wrastled as Jacob did langsyne  
For favours temporal an' divine.

'Twas gentler at a hushaba  
Than a wud-muffled waterla',  
Or cushats wi' their doonie croon  
Heard through a gowden afternoon,  
Or streams that rin wi' liquid laps,  
Or win's among the pine-tree taps.

'Twas sweet at a' times i' the mooth  
O' woman moved wi' meltin' truth ;  
But oh ! when first love was her care,  
'Twas bonnie far beyond compare.

'Twas mair sonorous than the Latin;  
Can' heavier on the hide o' Satin,  
When frae his Abel o' a poopit,  
The minister grew hearse an' roopit,  
An' banned wi' energetic jaw,  
The author o' the primal fa'.  
But if the poopit's sacred clangour,  
Was something awsome in its anger,  
Gude keep my southlan' freens fra'  
    hearin'  
A rouch red-headed Scotsman swearin' !

\**Modern Scottish Poets, with Biographical and Critical Notices*; By D. H. EDWARDS. Published by the Author. Brechin, Scotland. 4 vols.