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LITERARY AND ARTISTIC CELEBRITIES.

No. V.

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In the year of grace 1829, the writer of these sketches, who had then a goodly number of his teens in prospective, visited for the first time the great hall of the Parliament House of Edinburgh. This structure, as our North British friends require not to be informed, has since the Union been devoted to judicial instead of legislative purposes, and under its roof the Supreme Courts of Scotland, civil as well as criminal, hold their sederunts.

During "Session" time, nothing can be more animated than the appearance of the aforesaid hall. The floor is thronged with hosts of lawyers of all degrees, and clients of every class and description. It may be characterized as the national forensic exchange, where fortune and credit are the articles traded; an occasional "hazardous risk," in the shape of a capital felony, giving zest and piquancy to the more prosaic proceedings.

At the period of which I am speaking, all Scotland—I might almost say, the greater bulk of Europe—was agitated by the Burke and Hare murders, which had just been developed. In the very core of a Christian city, men and women had been strangled by the dozen, to furnish material for the dissecting-room, and that with all the system and method of a legitimate calling.

The actors in this wholesale wickedness  
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had been apprehended, but strong doubts existed as to whether a sufficiency of proof could be obtained to insure their conviction. Rumours prevailed that unless some of the Thugs turned King's evidence, the entire fraternity would, almost to a certainty, weather the gallows, and be left free to practice their ghastly trade with impunity. One thing was patent to all, viz., that the Crown officers were in frequent communication with diverse most suspicious-looking characters, who were supposed to have an inkling of the facts of this case of gigantic turpitude.

Whilst listening to the descriptions which an obliging cicerone was giving us of the more remarkable personages who replenished the "Outer House," our attention was emphatically arrested by an individual engaged in close, and apparently confidential communing with the Lord Advocate. The last-mentioned functionary, who possesses a power and an influence which no English or Irish official of the same order can boast of, was attired in the full and imposing robes of his rank, and exhibited an air of severe dignity well calculated to make the "profane vulgar" keep a respectable distance.

The companion of "the Advocate," as his lordship is usually styled, was a carelessly-dressed man, standing more than six feet high, and whose person was enveloped in a garment of brown cloth, which might be described as a compromise between the great-coat and the surtout. From beneath his broad-brimmed and somewhat rusted hat, there straggled a profusion of long, unkempt,