

## POETRY.

## CONTENTMENT.

No glory I covet, no riches I want,  
Ambition is nothing to me;  
The one thing I beg of kind Heaven to grant,  
Is a mind independent and free.

With passions unruffled, untainted with pride,  
By reason my life let me square;  
The wants of my nature are cheaply supplied,  
And the rest are but folly and care.

The blessings which Providence freely has lent,  
I'll justly and gratefully prize;  
Whilst sweet meditation and cheerful content  
Shall make me both healthful and wise.

In the pleasures the great man's possession display,  
Unenvied I'll challenge my part;  
For every fair object my eyes can survey,  
Contributes to gladden the heart.

How vainly, through infinite trouble and strife,  
The many their labours employ!  
Since all that is truly delightful in life,  
Is what all, if they please, may enjoy.

## BIOGRAPHY.

## ROBERT BURNS.

FROM THE SATURDAY MAGAZINE.

We inserted, in a former number, an extract from a Lecture on Popular Literature, for the purpose of pointing out the futility of some of the objections frequently urged against cultivating the minds of the poorer orders; and also for the purpose of citing the cases of some individuals, who had improved and refined themselves by education, without becoming in any way unfit to discharge the duties of their humble station in life. The man of whom we are now going to give a slight biographical sketch, was, we need hardly say, possessed of genius and powers of mind, which not only raised him vastly above the persons named in that paper, but which have seldom been surpassed in any rank or condition of society. There are, however, some circumstances in the history of Robert Burns, which should be known to every humble candidate for knowledge and fame: neither, we trust, can the principal incidents in the life of such a man be uninteresting to any of our readers.

Robert Burns was born in 1759, on the 25th of January;—and it happens, by a singular coincidence, that the corresponding day of the year 1772, witnessed the birth of another Scotch Poet, who has raised himself to celebrity, from a yet humbler origin than the Ayrshire ploughman,—we mean the simple, unsophisticated James Hogg, better known in the literary world by his more poetical name of the Ettrick Shepherd.

Burns was born in the parish of Alloway, about two miles from the town of Ayr, in a cottage by the way side, which was long pointed out to the traveller as his place of nativity; though, we believe, it has since been pulled down, and the timbers of the roof have been formed into boxes and various articles, highly prized by the admirers of the great bard. At the time of his birth his father was gardener to Mr. Ferguson of Ayr; though he afterwards became tenant successively of two or three small farms in the neighbourhood. Humble as was this station, we must not, however, suppose that it carried with it all the disadvantages incident to a like situation in South Britain. The Scotch peasantry enjoy great advantages for obtaining education. They have a school established by law in every parish, where elementary instruction may be obtained at the lowest price; and, as it is the habit and in the course of thinking of the parents lead them to practise the utmost self-denial, in order to procure yet farther information for their children. Neither can we forbear to pause for one moment, for the purpose of remarking, that when we consider in how great a degree the rural population of Scotland is free from crime,—a fact known and acknowledged on all sides,—this circumstance, even assisted, as we admit it to be, by some others, favourable to the innocence of the people, must be allowed to speak volumes in behalf of the great cause of popular education.

The father of Burns was an extraordinary character, of high principles, and of no common talents; and he yielded to none in his anxiety to procure every advantage of instruction for his children. Beside sending them to the parish school, he paid a master to instruct them at home; so that Robert, the eldest, not only was taught to read and to write, but was conversant with

the English grammar, and even learned some French; to which knowledge he afterwards added the elements of geometry and mensuration. Burns, therefore, started in his literary career with advantages superior to many, who have since been called self-taught poets. Still it should be remembered, that he passed the first twenty-three years of his life in a sough toil. He was literally, as he styled himself, a ploughman. His father worked his farms only by the labour of himself and his sons; a labour, that was exacted to the utmost; and it is melancholy to think that, even with the closest industry, combined with the strictest frugality, and the humblest mode of living, the poor old man was unsuccessful in all his efforts, and, after having been obliged to retire successively from three farms, died at last in poverty. Still, during the few hours of leisure that this laborious course of life afforded, Robert Burns eagerly devoured every book, which chance, or the kindness of friends, threw in his way.

He also sharpened his intellect by forming an association of young men, who met periodically to discuss subjects of importance and interest. But, much more than all, he occupied his mind, during this period of his life, in composing several of those poems, which have since inscribed his name in the rolls of fame. As he guided the plough or wielded the flail, his mind expatiated in the bright regions of fancy; and the little incidents of agricultural life, and the simple habits of agricultural economy, gave rise to the beautiful poems of the "Field Mouse," the "Mountain Daisy," and the most delightful of all, the "Cotter's Saturday Night." It is also remarkable that, while thus labouring for a bare subsistence, and never having extended his personal observation beyond the neighbouring market-town, Burns was yet able to form a just estimate of his own powers, and was conscious that they qualified him to take his place among the eminent and the great. At the same time, apprehensive that his humble and indigent circumstances would bar him from assuming his proper station, he felt within himself a restlessness and uneasiness, which we could well understand in such a man. In a letter written to his father, when he was twenty-two years of age, he says, "As for this world, I despair of ever making a figure in it. I am not formed for the bustle of the busy, nor the flutter of the gay; I shall never again be capable of entering into such scenes:—indeed, I am altogether unconcerned at the thoughts of this life. I foresee that poverty and obscurity probably await me, and I am in some measure prepared, and daily preparing to meet them. I have but just time and paper to return you my grateful thanks for the lessons of virtue and piety you have given me, which were too much neglected at the time of giving them, but which, I hope, have been remembered ere it is yet too late."

But at length the time arrived, that was to form the great epoch in the life of Burns. He had lost his excellent father; he had made an imprudent marriage; and farming had proved unprofitable. In despair, he came to the resolution to go out to Jamaica in the capacity of an assistant on the estate of Dr. Douglas;—but not having sufficient money to pay his passage, he was advised to endeavour to obtain the means, by publishing his poems by subscription. The success of the experiment exceeded his most sanguine wishes: they were warmly and universally admired, and procured for their author a sum of money, sufficient not only to induce him to abandon his design of quitting his native country, but also to give him the means of establishing himself in credit and comfort, in his former line of life, in any part of Scotland. His reputation also procured him invitations to Edinburgh, for which place he set out in November, 1786, and where he was received by the learned, by the great, and by the gay, with a cordiality and hospitality, which at once placed him among society widely different from any to which he before had been used, and which also, we fear, engendered tastes and habits, which were most injurious to his respectability, to his morals and religion, and to his happiness in his after life.

It is our desire to speak with the utmost tenderness of such a man as Burns. We wish it ever to be remembered, that to the end of his career, he maintained an integrity and independence of spirit, which no poverty could bend, and which we delight to see associated with so much genius. But we make no apology for his vices; neither, certainly, is it our intention to follow those scenes of irregularity, which at length brought his career to a premature close on the 21st of July, 1796, in his thirty-seventh year. Our object is principally to illustrate one point: by the successful sale of his poems, Burns had found himself in possession of nearly £500; a sum, that was sufficient to one whose means had always been so scanty, and certainly forming a sufficient capital to have enabled him to embark steadily and systematically in the reputable occupation of agriculture. In fact, he took the farm of Ellisland, on the banks of the Nith, a few miles above Dumfries, on which he entered at Whitsonide

1788. But his rustic labours soon grew distasteful to him, and were neglected, every thing on his farm went amiss, and, after an occupation of three years and a half, he resigned it into the hands of his landlord. In the mean while, Burns had also been appointed to an office of no large emolument in the excise, but this appointment, while it diverted him from the steady prosecution of his agricultural labours, threw him also into situations by no means favourable to the virtue of temperance; and from this, as well as from other concurrent circumstances, he became gradually more and more addicted to excesses in drinking, which undermined his health, and brought him to an early grave. It may also be added, that, although many passages in his writings, both in prose and verse, show that Burns was deeply impressed with the sentiment of religion; a sentiment, in which we can hardly conceive how by any possibility a real poet can be deficient; yet his devotional feelings do not appear to have sprung from sound Religious principle nor to have been sustained and strengthened by regular, constant, and systematic acts of worship. In short, the main purpose for which we have sketched the life of this extraordinary and unfortunate man, has been to show how the brightest genius may be obscured, and a mind of the highest and noblest aspirations may be laid low, by want of steadiness, by want of prudence, by want of perseverance, and above all by want of practical Religion.

Burns is not properly an instance of lowly talent cultivated and improved by its owner to his cost; his misfortunes were occasioned by other causes. His cultivated intellect would have added both to his respectability and to his happiness, if, at the same time he had learned to control his appetite, and acquire habits of regular application to business,—making his poetry a solace from care, a recreation from toil, or, to put it upon a lower footing, a source of profit, valuable and acceptable, but still secondary and subordinate to some fixed employment.

Immediately after the death of Burns, noble subscriptions were raised, in behalf of his destitute family: splendid monuments have since been erected to his memory.

The Scottish peasant feels his heart swell with pride, as he recollects that he is of the same country, and of the same class with the AYRSHIRE PLOUGHMAN. We think that not an honour beyond his desert has been lavished upon his memory as a genius:—we only wish his sad fate to be borne in mind, in order that it may serve as a beacon to mark the rocks on which genius may make shipwreck, when it is not under the guidance of religion, and not kept steady in its course, by regular and constant occupation.

## MISCELLANY.

**HORRIBLE TRAGEDY.**—The Gazette, published at New Albany, Ind. gives the details of a horrid transaction which recently took place at Corydon, in that State. One Ladd, the editor and publisher of a newspaper called the "Indianian," attempted to kill his own wife, and after stabbing her several times she fell, as he supposed dead. He then stabbed himself through the heart, and after he had fallen, he perceived that his wife was not dead, and said to her "I believe I shall die first;" giving her at the same time another blow, which was parried with her arm. He died in a very short time, and his wife was still living, though but feeble hopes were entertained of her recovery.

**BEWARE OF RED WAFERS.**—In this week's *Lancet*, a curious case is mentioned, in which the secretary of a public institution was twice attacked with a very violent fit of salivation, so as to render medical aid indispensable, from his having wafered 500 circulars with red wafers, which he wetted in his mouth.

**A NEW DEFINITION.**—A young lady being on an examination as to her proficiency in the science of Grammar, was asked why the noun bachelor is singular, replied with great apparent candour—because it is very singular that they don't get married.

In writing or speaking, give to every person his due title, according to his degree and the custom of the place.

When a man does all he can, though it succeeds not well, blame not him that did it.—*Washington*.

Why is a nobleman like a book? Because he has a title.

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