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FIVE CENTS.

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BY MRS. C. L. BALFOUR.

THE POETS OF SCOTLAND.

At the anniversary dinner of the St. Andrew's Society of Montreal, the Hon. T. D. McGee delivered a speech which claims the attention of every person of literary taste, as well from the subject on which he spoke, as from the mode of its treatment by him, than which nothing could be finer. The toast which called forth his remarks was "The Poets of Scotland," a great theme, to which the eloquent gentleman did great justice. Like all men who take a prominent part in public affairs, Mr. McGee has encountered enemies, or at least bitter opponents, in his native land, in the United States and the British Provinces; but when he discourses of literary matters, that man must be a bigot indeed who can listen to him without pleasure, he certainly ought not without profit. Persons who pride in calling themselves practical men are apt to undervalue the benefits that literature has conferred on the world, even in a material point of view. Yet literature is the creator of commerce; it has discovered a new world through the agency of Columbus, it has invented the steam engine, and we owe to it the spinning jenny and the electric telegraph. Every invention which has made the last hundred years so remarkable in the history of the world, we chiefly derive from the great thinkers of the past; for all these inventions are the product of human thought. Every poet, historian, orator, painter and sculptor who has bequeathed a new idea as his legacy to mankind has aided in the construction of modern railroads, of the Great Eastern, the Warrior and La Gloire. Watts is the product of Homer. But to return to Mr. McGee and his speech on the Poets of Scotland. He grouped together as the representatives of Scottish song, Burns, Sir Walter Scott, Thomas Campbell, and Joanna Baillic, while not forgetful of Barbour and the elder worthies who are as myths to the most of us of the present day. He spoke of the writers he selected in terms of high praise, but with discriminating judgment. We certainly expected that Mr. McGee would have said something about the ballad poetry of Scotland, which, in our opinion, is more characteristic of the poetical temperament of her people than all the utterances of all the eminent men he has enumerated, with the exception, perhaps, of Burns. That ballad poetry has welled up from the heart of the nation, it comes from the depths of the popular mind, and, for graphic description and simple pathos, is unsurpassed by that of any country whatever. The question then arises, if the people who produced such poetry can be the hard unimaginative race they are so generally supposed to be by those who judge them from outward appearances? The popular

poetry of Scotland is not like water issuing from a rock in the wilderness at the touch of some prophet's rod, but it gushes forth freely and abundantly on every plain, in every glen, and from every hill-side throughout the land; and, we again say, at the risk of indulging in a broken metaphor, that its source is in the hearts of the people. But we are wandering anew from our main subject. In what rank ought the four poets named by Mr. McGee to be placed, not regarding them as Scotchmen simply, but as men of genius? As everything is great or small by comparison, we must judge them by some standard. Let us then measure them by men speaking their own language, the great men of England. In the first class of these are Shakespeare, Milton, Bacon, Newton; in the second class, let us say, Dryden, Pope, Swift, Addison, Locke; there are lower grades of poets and others, but we need go no further. We can no more place Burns by the side of Shakespeare than we can magnify Horace to the colossal dimensions of Homer. Descending to the second class, is he equal in genius to Dryden? We do not assert that Burns has written anything comparable in their way to several of the best passages in Absalom and Achitophel; but, on the other hand, we do not believe that Dryden's works contain anything equal to Tam O'Shanter, which is a marvel of genius and talent, striking every chord in the poetic scale, from the highest tragedy to the broadest farce. Then the lyrical genius of both was eminently beautiful. On the whole, we think Burns entitled to stand in the front rank of the second class of English poets. What of Walter Scott? For our part, we regard him as next to Shakespeare in English literature, widely as the two differed in the character of their intellect. The one was chiefly an observer of outward nature, and he described men by their acts; the other looked into the human heart, and saw its most secret and complex movements. The minds of both were of the grandest proportions. But Scott is too near our day to allow us to form a true estimate of him; he will be better appreciated by men of the coming century. As for Campbell and Joanna Baillic, we suspect that posterity will not accord them a place in either the first or second rank of British authors, though Campbell has written much that the world will not willingly let die.

It is seldom that an after-dinner speech is so worthy of comment as that which has led to these cursory remarks.

REVIEWS.

Books for review should be forwarded, as soon as published, to the Editor, SATURDAY READER.

SEASIDE STUDIES ON NATURAL HISTORY. By Elizabeth C. Agassiz and Alexander Agassiz. Marine Animals of Massachusetts Bay. Radicals. Boston: Ticknor & Fields, 1865. Montreal: Dawson Bros.

We are told in the preface that, "this volume is produced with the hope of supplying some seaside book of a popular character describing the marine animals common to our shore." In the attainment of this object the authors have certainly been successful, for they have written a book which will be read with pleasure even by persons very moderately acquainted with Natural History. Another recommendation to the work is that it receives the sanction of Professor Agassiz, by being dedicated to him. The illustrations are unusually good, and the publishers have done their part, by turning out a volume, well bound and beautifully printed.

HISTORY OF FREDERICK THE SECOND, &c. By Thomas Carlyle. In six Volumes. Vol. 5. New York. Harper Brothers, Publishers, 1865. Montreal: R. Worthington.

This famous work has been criticised, reviewed, praised and blamed to such an extent, that were we inclined to exercise our critical faculties on it, we could only repeat what has been repeated, said and sung in every publication in England and America, from the oracular review enunciating its infallible judgment, to the village Weekly equally oracular, but somewhat less profuse and profound. We have not yet received the sixth and last volume; but this, the fifth must contain the cream of the work, as it relates the most stirring incidents of the seven years' war, to which the Prussian king owes his chief claims to fame. Whatever people may think of Mr. Carlyle's manner and style, that his life of Frederick is a remarkable and interesting production cannot admit of denial.

SKYE.

SEPARATED by a narrow channel from Scotland, the island of Skye is perhaps as little known to the majority of Englishmen, and even Scotchmen, as the interior of Russia. And yet, grim, weird and terrible in its beauty there are few spots within the compass of an ordinary three or four weeks' tour which offer greater attractions to one who loves to commune with nature in its quiet sublimity, than this little island. Nor is it solely the grandeur of its natural scenery which should attract. The memories of great men cling to it and the very air seems brimful of antiquity. Perhaps nobody but a poet could describe Skye as it should be done, and this is probably the secret of Mr. Alexander Smith's success in the work he has lately published entitled a "Summer in Skye." "Walking into the interior of Skye" he writes, "is like walking into antiquity.—In the quiet silent wilderness you think of London, Liverpool, Edinburgh, or whatever great city it may be given you to live and work in, as of something of which you were cognizant in a former existence.—Everything about you is a veritable antique. The hut by the roadside, thatched with turfs, smoke issuing from the roof, is a specimen of one of the oldest styles of architecture in the world. The crooked spade, with which the crofter turns over the sour grounds, carries you away into fable. You remove a pile of stones on the moor, and you come to a flagged chamber, in which there is a handful of human bones—whose, none can tell. Duntulm and Dansciach moulder on their crags, but the song the passing milkmaid sings is older than they. You come upon old swords which were once bright and athirst for blood; old brooches that once clasped plaids, old churchyards with cravings of unknown knights on the tombs, and old men who seem to have inherited the years of the eagle and the crow.—You stumble, too, on forms of life, relations of master and servant, which are as old as the castle on the crag or the cairn of the chief on the moor.—In these remote regions, your servants' affection for you is as hereditary as their family name, your foster-brother would willingly die for you, and if your nurse had the writing of your epitaph, you would be the bravest, strongest, handsomest man that ever walked."

It was in Skye that "Ossian lived and Fingal sung" Here too the young Pretender retired when the bloody field of Culloden forced him to seek safety in flight. Here too came Johnson.

* A SUMMER IN SKYE. By Alexander Smith. Boston Ticknor & Fields. Montreal: Dawson Bros.