

tudes of Scottish, and even of British, poetry. Between Chaucer and Surrey there was hardly any English poetry, whilst there was Scottish poetry of considerable excellence, notably ballads of a very high order. After the Reformation Scottish song was almost silent. When we remember the period in the life of Milton—between the earlier poems and the *Paradise Lost*—the period of the Commonwealth in which he produced religious and political pamphlets instead of poems, we may be able to understand how the religious movement in Scotland absorbed all the literary energy of the people and left them none for the cultivation of the muses.

The eighteenth century was nowhere productive in works of imagination, and in Scotland was given up to the study of history, philosophy and economy. A country which can boast of the great names of Hume, Robertson, Reid, Stewart and Adam Smith, need not be ashamed of its place in the Republic of Letters. Of poets before Burns—belonging to post-Reformation times—there are only two worthy of mention, the greater light, Allan Ramsay (1685-1758), whose "Gentle Shepherd" is still worthy of perusal. Ramsay himself thought it superior to the "Pastor Fido" of Guarini, a question which we need not decide—the lesser light, Robert Ferguson, born 1750. A later contemporary, Tannahill (1774-1810), completes the circle.

In these brief notes it may be convenient to take the life of the poet in periods, marked by his successive residences:—

I. ALLOWAY 1759-1766 (till 7 years of age).

Burns's father, who spelt his name *Burness*, came from Kincardineshire, his native place, and after several vicissitudes, settled in Ayrshire in 1750, and took seven acres of ground

in the parish of Alloway. Here he built the "auld clay biggin'" in which his son was born. In 1757, then aged 36, he married Agnes Brown, of Maybole, in Carrick. Gilbert was his first son, Robert the second. It was from his mother that Burns derived his wonderful eyes which so impressed Walter Scott when he saw him in Edinburgh. Of Burns's father, Murdoch, the poet's teacher, declares that he spoke English well, and that he was a man of "stubborn, ungainly integrity, and of headlong, ungovernable irascibility."

II. MOUNT OLIPHANT. 1766-1777 (Aetat. 7-18).

Burns's father removed to Mount Oliphant in 1766, and lived here in great poverty, his boys helping him on the farm. Gilbert and Robert were taught ordinary subjects by their father, and French by Murdoch. Poor as they were, they were better circumstanced in regard to literature than many more wealthy children. The father was fond of books, and Robert relates that he read a good many books in his boyhood, the "Vision of Mirza," with great admiration, Addison's Hymns, the life of Hannibal and that of Sir W. Wallace. Later on he read Pope's Homer and other works, the works of Richardson, Smollett, Locke and Shakespeare—not a bad beginning for a poor boy. Afterwards, Shenstone, Thomson, Ferguson, Sterne, Ossian (!), Milton, and, above all, the Bible. He also learned to dance, in opposition to his father's will.

III. LOCHLEA. 1777-1784 (Aetat. 18-25).

With the removal to Lochlea, in 1777, we come to a period of greater importance. His early poems were of little account. But here we find him in love with a girl named Ellison Begbie, who is celebrated by him under two names, Peggy Alison and