

his mind when he was but fifteen years of age. While a student of divinity he wrote three Sabbath School Tales, two of which relate to events of great interest in the history of Scotland. The three works were subsequently published in one volume, entitled *Tales of the Covenanters*. Just before he received his license to preach, *The Course of Time* was finished. Upon the recommendation of Professor Wilson of Edinburgh, who recognized in the poem great poetic power, it was published by Mr. Blackwood. It was received by many with high approval, but was enthusiastically lauded by the *English Eclectic Review*, and thus the way was opened for its eager reception. It was welcomed by many who would not read the religious literature of the time on account of its dryness and insipidity. In 1857 an illustrated edition of the work appeared, this being its twenty-first edition. The argument of the poem may thus be briefly stated.

A spirit from one of the numerous worlds of immensity, at the close of a happy probation, is pursuing his joyous way to the heavenly mansions. The abode of the lost presents itself to his now greatly enlarged vision. He hears sighs that ever sigh and groans that ever groan. On arriving at the world of perfected virtue he meets two happy sons of Paradise who welcome him home; and he inquires of them the meaning of the wretchedness he has just witnessed. Being unable to answer his questions fully, they conduct him to a Bard who once lived on Earth, and he replies by relating the history of Man from the Creation to the final judgment—embracing an account of the fall, the provision made for man's recovery, the treatment of this provision, and the results of happiness and woe which followed.

The poem is composed of ten books, with an average of eight hundred and fifty-five lines. For the most part it is absorbingly interesting. If occasionally the interest flags, it is only for a short time. There is cause for surprise that the work is not

more generally read and more widely known. The Christian spirit which pervades it is its highest commendation. That it is neglected by the literary world is perhaps not so much to be wondered at; but it should have a place in the library of every lover of evangelical truth and sublime religious poetry. If it were read in place of many of those poems which are so much talked of, and with which everybody thinks he must become acquainted, the result would be a more refined pleasure and much greater profit. It is very evident that the author's mind was imbued with *Paradise Lost*, for he often follows Milton to the verge of direct imitation.

Being vulnerable in some points as the best works must ever be, *The Course of Time* was sharply assailed by carping critics. But it must be remembered that it received no revision. The "thoughts that breathe and words that burn" were thrown off with a glowing pen, and then the author passed away. What to some may serve to give a keen edge to unfriendly criticism, may to others enhance the merit of the work. Want of rigid adherence to pagan models instead of being looked upon as a defect would by many be accepted as a meritorious feature. It is to be regretted that the poem had not undergone a revision, but as it stands we may predict for it a higher place in the literature of the future than is accorded to it in the literature of our own time. "It has the relish of a cluster from the promised land; and is an earnest of millennial poetry. It breathes out balmy air, like breezes of the celestial City. It echoes thrilling music, as if from sainted choirs above, harping round the Throne. This poet drank not at pagan wells; but at the crystal spring where stood and drew the gifted seers and bards of Judah, there he quaffed deep and long the living waters. . . . To himself may be applied with as much justice as to the renowned Poet of whom they are written, his own words:—"

The Bard, by God's own hand anointed, who,
To Virtues' all-delighting harmony,