

LITERATURE, &c.

FROM ALLEN CUNNINGHAM'S HISTORY OF THE LITERATURE OF THE LAST FIFTY YEARS.

ROGERS.

If we observe in the strains of Crabbe, a leaning to the sneering and cynical, we meet with no such unwelcome things in the works of Samuel Rogers: like Crabbe, he is distinguished for a terseness of expression; for thinking correctly and writing clearly; for loving scenes of humble life, and 'preferring hind-scapes which, like those of Gainsborough, belong more to reality than imagination.' Here the resemblance ends; the tasteful muse of Rogers selects topics of a pure and poetic order; he refuses to unchain the door of the lazar-house; he delights in contemplating whatever is fair and beautiful; and has no wish to describe Eden, for the sake of showing the Evil Spirit crawling among the trees, and dying like a toad at the ear of beauty and innocence to inspire mischief.

Rogers was some thirty years old when his first poem was published; when his second appeared, he was fifty. A great change had come over the world in the interval: the little world of the muse had undergone a sort of revolution. A number of eminent poets had arisen—not men who, like Grey, were content to print one small volume, and then remain silent—but bards who poured out, fast and bright, a succession of epic poems and rhyme romances, all long compositions, and who promised more. Nor was this all: with the exception of Campbell, the whole of those poets, from natural impulse or taste, had strung their harps to other melody than what had hitherto charmed; they were not content with filling the market with poetic wares; they changed pattern and texture, and led away the public taste from a commodity which had been fashionable for a century. With all these drawbacks, 'The Voyage of Columbus' was favourably received; the story of that navigator's wondrous undertaking is indeed ever interesting; we peruse and rereuse the tale of his fortunes with undiminished interest; and set him down as one of the most undaunted heroes of Christian chivalry. The whole undertaking is of itself poetic; and it is to the credit of Rogers' taste that he, though by a succession of scenes, copied from the picturesque events of the voyage, to bring the before the reader's fancy. In this he succeeded; yet the poem did not make its way so readily to men's hearts as the 'Pleasures of Memory.' Little that was new was said about Columbus, and I believe I am right in saying that we prefer history in prose to history in verse.

There are three poems, all of original merit, with something of similarity in title—'The Pleasures of Imagination'—the 'Pleasures of Hope,'—and the 'Pleasures of Memory.' With the titles the similitude ends. The poem of Akenside is for the present, that of Campbell for the future, and that of Rogers for the past. There is most fine poetry in the first, most enthusiasm in the second, and most human nature in the third. 'The Pleasures of Memory' was published in the year 1792, and became at once popular. To the spirit of original observation, to the fine pictures of men and manners; and to the remarks on the social and domestic condition of the country, which mark the disciples of the newest school of verse, are added the terseness, smoothness and harmony of the old. The poem abounds with happy and brilliant hits; with passages which remain on the memory, and may be said to please rather than enchant one; to take silent possession of the heart, rather than fill it with immediate rapture. Hazlitt, with something of that perverseness, which even talent is not without, said, the chief fault of Rogers was want of genius and taste. Perhaps in the whole list of living men of genius, no one can be named whose taste in poetry is so just and delicate. This is apparent in every page of his compositions; nay, he is even fastidious in his taste, and rejects much in the pictures of manners and feelings which he paints, which other authors, whose taste is unquestioned, would have used without scruple. His diction is pure, and his language has all the necessary strength without being swelling or redundant; his words are always in keeping with the sentiment. He has in truth, great strength; He says much in small compass, and may sometimes be charged with a too great anxiety to be brief and terse. It was the error of the school in which his taste was formed, to be over-anxious about the harmony and polish of the verse; and he may be accused of erring with his teachers. Concerning the composition of 'The Pleasures of Memory,' it is related that he corrected, transposed, and changed, till he exhausted his own patience, and then turning to his friends he demanded their opinions, listening to every remark, and weighing every observation. This plan of correction is liable to serious objections. The poet is almost sure of losing in dash and vigor more than what he gains by correctness; and as a whole, the work is apt to be injured, while individual parts are bettered. Poetry is best hit off at one heat of the fancy: the more it is hammered and wrought on, the colder it becomes. The sale of 'The Pleasures of Memory' continued to be large, though 'The Pleasures of Hope' came into the market.

Some two years or so after the publication of 'Columbus,' the poem of 'Jaqueline' made its appearance, accompanied by a poem of 'Lara,' by Byron. This was an injudicious step; it was not possible for the muse of the elder bard to have fair play, the world was bewitched with the genius of the young one, was desirous of redeeming the grievous wrong done him by the *Edinburgh Review*; and, moreover, knowing that he was a little wild and whimsical, looked for some of his personal adventures in the burning rhymes which he wrote. The mild, the amiable, and the graceful Jaqueline, was an unfit companion for the moody, mysterious, and revengeful Lara. With how little justice, 'Jaqueline' was looked coldly upon, may be gathered from the following fine passage: others as good, and some better, abound.

Soon as the sun the glittering pane
On the red floor in diamonds threw,
His songs she sung, and sun again,
Till the last light withdrew.
Every day, and all day long,
He mused or slumbered to a song.
But she is dead to him, to all!
Her late hangs silent on the wall;
And on the stairs and at the door
Her fairy foot is heard no more!
At every meal an empty chair
Tells him that she is not there.

This ill-assorted union was dissolved by the bookseller; no estrangement, however, took place between the poets; they were frequently to be seen and found together; Moore, and, for a time, Campbell, were added to the entree, and many jests were scattered about Lara and Jacqueline, and much wine consumed. Some one said to Byron, it was a Sternhold and Hopkins sort of affair. Rogers aspired no more to tell true-love stories, either serious or comic; he probably desired to read his noble companion a lesson in his next essay, which was the poem entitled 'Human Life.' This work stands high in public esteem; it contains passages worthy of any poet; the chief fault is the breadth and length of the subject. It is seldom, I fear, that the sad condition of man is changed, or his morals amended, by gentle verse and by courteous admonition. When the poet makes every touch of his satiric thong tell on the culprit like a Russian knout, his powers are respected; but Rogers had no desire to tie up human nature and give it a flogging; he passed it under a tender and merciful review, and spoke of it as a work honourable to its maker. The poet saw only the bright side of the scene;—a man with choice fruits on his garden walls, fine wines on his sideboard, savoury dishes done to a turn on his table, and money in the bank to work while he sleeps, will not likely think that human life is a gift scarce worth receiving. He loved to look at man

Well fed, well lodged, and gently handled.

His last poem is that called 'Italy'; it abounds with fine passages, with descriptions which have all the brightness of Claude's landscapes, and with groups which have the invention of Flaxman and the gracefulness of Chantrey. It may be instanced as a confirmation of my opinion of taste, that he has illustrated this work by aid of the pencils of Stothard and Turner, in a way so beautiful, that it surpasses all other works in the exquisite grace and simplicity of its embellishments.

Rogers is the only affluent worshipper of the muse—he is a bander, and as such bears an honest name; he lives in St. James's Place, and has some choice pictures by his friend Sir Joshua Reynolds, and many matters rare and curious; among which, the agreement of Milton regarding 'Paradise Lost,' and of Dryden respecting his translation of Virgil, both bearing their signatures, are the most remarkable. He is, in all respects, an accomplished gentleman; he has always borne his fame and fortune meekly, his conversation is rich and various, concise and epigrammatic. He has lived much in the society of the learned, the noble, and the inspired; and of all whom he knew he has something clever to relate. He has lived seventy years in the world, and a spirit of observation, his Reminiscences would make a surprising look. He has the best taste in painting of any of our poets, nor is his sense of sculpture inferior.

PSALM CXXXVII.

Paraphrased from the Vulgate.

By Babylon's rivers we sat down and wept,
When the thought of our Zion came o'er us,
On the willows which over the mid-waters swept,
We hung up our mute harps before us:

For those who had led us all captive away,
The words of our psalter attended;
Yea, our task-masters said, "Come, laugh ye to-day!"
And the songs of our Zion commended.

Oh, how shall I sing, in this far-away land,
The words of the hymns of our High One?
But be withered for ever my hand—my right hand,
If thee I remember not, Zion!

My tongue to my jaws let it gather and cleave,
If I weep not for all has come o'er thee!
If once I forget, when I sorrow or grieve,
If ought I do think of before thee!

And the children of Edom remember, O Lord,
In the day of Jerusalem's glory!
"Destroy it, and raze it, destroy!" was their word—
"To the stone of its lowermost story."

Yes, Babylon's daughter! the doomed—the accurst.
Happy he who shall yet come to smite thee,
Who, for all thou dost to us—thy blackest and worst—
With the blackest and worst shall requite thee.

EVENING.—There are two periods in the life of man, in which the evening hour is peculiarly interesting—in youth and in old age. In youth we love it for its mellow moonlight, its million stars, its then rich and soothing shades, its still serenity; amid these we can commune with our loves, or twine the wreaths of friendship, while there is none to bear us witness but the heavens and the spirits that hold their endless Sabbath there, or look into the deep bosom of creation, spread abroad like a canopy above us, and look and listen till we can almost see and hear the waving wings and melting songs of other worlds. To youth the evening is delightful; it accords with

the flow of his light spirits, the fervor of his infancy, and the softness of his heart. Evening is also the delight of virtuous age—it affords hours of undisturbed contemplation; it seems an emblem of the calm and tranquil close of busy life—serene, placid and mild, with the impress of its great Creator stamped upon it; it spreads its quiet wings over the grave, and seems to promise that all shall be peace beyond it.

LOSS OF CHARACTER.—A respectable farmer in Ross-shire, travelling a short distance on horseback, having occasion to cross the river Conan, found on the banks of the stream a young woman also desirous of getting across. She informed the farmer that she was in quest of a situation, and had an excellent character from her last place. As the river was high, the good natured farmer took the girl up behind him on his horse, and conveyed her over the water. Unfortunately, however, the written certificate of character fell out of the young woman's braost, where she had placed it for safety, and was carried off by the stream. She was in distress at this mishap, till her kind conductor assured her that he would give her a character; and this pledge he redeemed, on their arrival at a house on the opposite side, in the following brief but pithy words:—September 10, 1833.—These certify that the bearer, Peggy M'Kenzie, lost her character this day, while crossing the river Conan with me, Andrew Munro. We need hardly add, that this very equivocal statement was given in good faith and sincerity. The girl accepted it with many thanks, but was soon convinced that the honest farmer's words did not correspond with his intentions, and that she required, what it is generally difficult to obtain, a new character.

AN OLD MINISTER'S TALE.

BY THE ETRICK SHEPHERD.

THE Rev Mr M'Donald of Kilmore, whom I once met at Oban on a visit, related to me a great number of Highland stories, for the purpose, as he expressed it, that I should make something of them. One of them was about John Campbell of Kilcagar, who went out one day to hunt on the lands of Glen-Orn, which then belonged to M'Culloch of Gresharvish. Mr Campbell not returning in the evening, his lady became very much alarmed, especially as his favorite pointer dog Eachern came home alone, and apparently very disconsolate, and his dam Oich did not come at all. Mrs. Campbell did not know in the least where to send in search of her husband, but she raised the men-servants before daylight, some of whom went for the fox-hunter, who knew all the shooting ground in the vicinity, and they went searching and calling the whole day, but found nothing.

In the meantime, a shepherd of Glen-Orn arrived at Kilcagar, and told Mrs Campbell that he had found her husband, lying shot through the heart in Correi-Balloch, a wild wooded ravine on the lands of Glen-Orn, and his pointer bitch lying at his side moaning, but refusing to leave him. The man told his story so abruptly, that Mrs Campbell fainted, and was long unable to give orders about any thing. The body, however was brought home, poor Oich following it, and finally buried in the island of Lismore, the burial place of the family; but Oich followed it there, and though brought home many times, and greatly caressed, she always went back again, until at last she died on the grave.

A strict investigation was immediately set on foot regarding the mysterious murder of Mr Campbell, for as his gun was found loaded, it was certain he could not have shot himself, and, after some inquiry, Mr M'Culloch was arrested, and taken to the prison of Inverary, examined by the sheriff, and committed for trial. And here is the trial on a single leaf, which I believe is nearly the truth.

Mr M'Culloch acknowledged, both before the sheriff and the lords of the judiciary court, at the circuit, that he had heard the report of a gun on his lands, had gone to the place, and, on seeing the pointers, went to the spot, where he found his friend Mr Campbell lying at the point of death; that he turned him over, when he vomited some blood, and then expired.

Mrs Campbell, on being examined, said she did not believe Mr M'Culloch would have shot her husband, although the latter should have shot all the game on the other's estate; for that they were particular friends, and always shot together, visiting each other in the most friendly and amicable way very frequently. The paper then proceeds to detail the examination of William Bawn M'Nichol.

'Where were you that morning when Mr Campbell was murdered?' 'I was in Clash-ne-shalloch.' 'How far is that from Correi-Balloch?' 'Hersel does not know; she never measured it.' 'How far do you think it may be?' 'Why hersel thinks it will never be much further than it is at present.' 'In what time could you go from one place to the other?' She could take a tay to go it, or half a tay, or an hour if hersel was to rhuin it.' 'And you heard the shot fired from the one place to the other?' 'Nho, she did not hear it fired, but she heard it gho out with a great plow-off.' 'And what made you leave the one glen to go to the other? Did you suspect any thing?' 'Hoo, yes, hersel did suspect something.' 'What do you suspect?' 'She