

A SWEET SCOTCH SINGER.

PASTOR FELIX WRITES AGAIN OF
JOANNA BAILLIE.

Scott's Part in Bringing Out "The Family Legend"—Campbell's Criticism of Her Plays—A Beautiful Love Lyric—Miss Baillie Died at the Age of Eighty-nine.

WRITTEN FOR PROGRESS.

Miss Baillie's principal works are dramatic according to their formal construction, but not according to their spirit. She had carefully studied and with much emulation, dramatic literature, and the mechanism of the drama; and she succeeded in producing poems, written in elegant and often impassioned diction, but not adapted to the stage. Several were moderately successful, in the hands of able and eminent artists, but only temporarily so. No one of them is put upon the boards today, nor has been for years. Scott was the instrument of bringing out her drama, "The Family Legend," at Edinburgh in 1810. "It was," says Howitt, "the first new play brought out by Mr. Henry Siddons, and was very well received, a fortune which has rarely attended her able tragedies, which are imagined to be more suitable for the closet than the stage. There they will continue to charm, while vigor of conception, a clear and masterly style, and healthy nobility of sentiment, retain their hold on the human mind." "De Montfort" was put on the stage in London, but with all the advantage to be derived from Kemble and Siddons, the public did not endorse it, and the most candid and appreciative reader will not now question the justness of the popular verdict. Her talents and the whole scheme upon which she wrought were sufficient reason for the failure to interest the theatre going public. Like Byron and Henry Taylor, her genius was essentially undramatic. She designed to illustrate a separate passion in each particular play. By an alternate tragedy and comedy, she would illustrate Hate, Jealousy, Fear, Love, in their most powerful exercise, through the conduct of one individual under the influence of these passions. Such a psychological scheme could hardly succeed in the hands of a dramatic master. "Not only is there a flaw in the fundamental idea, that, viz., of an individual who is the embodiment of a single passion, but there is a want of incident and a narrowness, consequent upon the attention being too much directed upon a single point, that present insuperable obstacles to their success as acting pieces. The plot is generally well constructed, but the very consciousness of aim with which it is wrought out gives to the whole a morbid and unnatural aspect; there is rarely, if ever, any progress in the play; the whole is apparent from the outset, and the action never heightens the spectator's interest. It must be confessed also, that Miss Baillie had no very adequate notion of what is required in a stage drama, and that her experience was too limited. This is apparent in her comedies, which are very inferior productions. In short, her want of success is a clear proof of the impracticability of that analytic or psychologic method, which expounds and defends in her preliminary dissertations. None but the literary students will now devote much attention to these works. But this is not spoken in their depreciation. All but the very greatest works of highest genius are crowded out by the newcomers." The ordinary mind, busied with Browning and Tennyson, can know but little of most excellent authors in a past age. But her songs, and passages of her dramas, demonstrate that Joanna Baillie has the right to live in our literature, and in the annals of ages to come. She discloses a masterly intellect, and no mean poetic ability. Her mind was analytic and acute; her style excelled in strength, purity and vigor. Occasionally she rises into a strain "of high poetic feeling and expression," or rounds out a sentiment such as,—

"Friendship is no plant of hasty growth;
Though planted in esteem's deep fixed soil,
The gradual culture of kind intercourse
Must bring it to perfection."

But, on the whole, her songs and shorter pieces, such as "The Kitten," "Lines to Agnes Baillie, on her Birthday," "The Chough and the Crow," "To a Child," etc. Of her "Plays on the Passions," the finest are "Henriette," "The Separation," "De Montfort," and "Count Basil," all of which abound in tragic and powerful passages. But when the lover of Scottish song has ceased to read them, he will not have forgotten or neglected "Saw ye Johnnie Comin'," "A Young Gudewife is in My House," "Poverty Parts Gude Companie," or the sailor's song beginning—

"O' swifly glides the bonny boat
Just parted from the shore."
A beautiful lyric of love in innocence,
—and yet ill at ease—in rural life, is her "Shepherd's Song":—

"The gowan glitters on the sward,
The lark's in the sky,
And Colly on my plaid keeps ward,
And time is passing by;
Oh, no! sad an' slow
The shadow of our tryin' bush,
It wears ae slowly round!
My sheep bell tinges frae the west,
My laubs are bleating near;
But still the sound that I lo'e best,
Alike! I canna hear,
Oh, no! sad an' slow!"

"If Joanna Baillie had known the stage practical, she would never have attacked the importance which she did to the development of single passions in single tragedies; and she would have invented more stirring incidents to justify the passion of her characters, and to give them that air of fatality which, though peculiarly predominant in the Greek drama, will also be found, to a certain extent, in all successful tragedies. Instead of this, she contrives to make all the passions of her main characters proceed from the wilful natures of the beings themselves."

THOMAS CAMPBELL.

The shadow lingers still;
And like a lonely ghastly stand,
And crouch upon the hill.
"I hear below the water roar,
The mill w' clackin' din;
And Luckie scolding frae the door
To bring the nannies in.
Ah, no! sad an' slow!
These are nae sounds for me;
The shadow of our tryin' bush,
It creeps sae drearily."

"I celt yestreen, frae Chapman Tam,
A snood of bonnie blue,
And promised, when our tryin' cam,
To tie it round her brow.
Oh, no! sad an' slow!
The time it winna pass;
The shadow of that weary thorn
Is tethered on the grass."

"Oh now I see her on the way,
She's passed the witchin' knowe;
She's climbin' up the brownie's brae—
My heart is in a lowe.
Oh, no! 'tis nae so!
'Tis glaurie I hae seen:
The shadow of that hawthorn bush
Will move nae mair till e'en."

"My book of grace I'll try to read;
Though comin' w' little skill;
When Colly barks I'll raise my head,
And find her on the hill.
Oh, no! sad an' slow!
The time will ne'er be gane;
The shadow of the tryin' bush
Is fixed like ony stane."

This woman of gifted mind, and charitable hand and heart, lived into ripe age. She died at her home at Hampstead, Feb. 23rd, 1851, in her 84th year, having survived all the members of her family but her sister Agnes, and many of her personal friends. Her dramatic and poetical works were issued in one complete volume, in London, in 1851.

PASTOR FELIX.

ADDENDA.—The passage in which Jane De Montfort is described, will exhibit the loveliness and strength of Joanna Baillie at highest advantage. It is said to derive additional interest from the model from which it is alleged she drew,—the peerless Mrs. Siddons. These lines have been pronounced highly characteristic:

Page. Madam, there is a lady in your hall
Who begs to be admitted to your presence.
Lady. Is it not one of our invited friends?
Page. No; far unlike to them. It is a stranger.
Lady. How looks her countenance?
Page. No queenly, so commanding, and so noble,
I shrink 't first in awe; but when she smiled
Methought I could have compassed sea and land
To do her bidding.

Lady. Is she young or old?
Page. Neither, if right I guess; but she is fair,
For Time had laid his hand so gently on her.

Lady. As he had been awed.
The foolish stripping!
She has bewitched, then. Is she large in stature?
Page. So stately and so graceful is her form,
I thought at first her stature was gigantic;
But on a near approach, I found, in truth,
She scarcely does surpass the middle size.

Lady. What is her garb?
Page. I cannot well describe the fashion of it;
She is not decked in any gaudy trim,
But seems to be clad in her natural weeds
Of high habitual state; for as she moves,
Wide flows her robe in many a waving fold,
As if I have seen untutored banners play
With the soft breeze.

Lady. Thine eyes deceive thee, boy;
It is an apparition thou hast seen.
Frederick. (Starting from his seat, where he has been sitting during the conversation.)
It is an apparition I have seen,
Or it is Jane De Montfort.

That last stroke is very effective, and the whole is powerfully delineated. In such points as these did the poetess excel.

P. F.

FROM RICHES TO RAGS.

A True Life-Story of Today From the Streets of London.

One of the most distressing and heart-rending scenes ever witnessed by the present writer was the death of a fireman—a brave young fellow, in the pride of manly health and strength, who, risking his life to save that of another, was literally crushed to death by a collapse of a burning building. It was indeed "hard luck for poor Joe" (as a sympathetic comrade put it), for he was the youngest fireman there, and had been married but a fortnight. Just as his future looked brightest and happiest—he was crushed!

This incident crossed our mind while listening to the story of a man's life—a life crushed, not by falling masonry, but by an avalanche of adversity and sorrow—such an experience of adverse fortune and tribulation as it is, thank Heaven! the lot of few of us to undergo.

While walking along one of London's busy thoroughfares some short time ago, the writer witnessed what nearly proved to be a very serious accident. In jumping from a tramcar—on which he had probably been pushing his wares—an old man, carrying a bundle of newspapers under his arm was caught by one of the shafts of a passing vehicle, and dashed senseless to the ground. Aided by one or two of the bystanders who had witnessed the occurrence, we saved him from being run over, and carried him to a surgery close at hand. Luckily, no bones were broken, and he soon recovered sufficiently to walk; with a little help from the writer, making his way home.

He was an old man, with grey hair and beard, and the appearance of his face, covered as it was with severe lines, denoting much sorrow and trial and desolation, impressed one with a kind of awe. The terrible look of silent suffering (irrespective of the fact that though dressed in little better than rags he was still of gentlemanly appearance) told more plainly than words that he was a "man with a history."

He seemed very grateful for the assistance rendered him, and on arriving at the house in which he lived was protuse in his thanks; adding, however—

"I don't know that it would have much mattered had I been killed. I've nothing to live for."

"Oh, but you must not say that. No matter how black things look, there is a silver lining to every cloud," we suggested.

"Ah! I thought so once," he went on musingly. Then suddenly he exclaimed; "Come inside and listen to me, and afterwards tell me what I want with my life—tell me, if you can, why I have not taken it myself, long ago."

The neighbourhood in which he lived was none too aristocratic; the house was a lodging-house (somewhat higher in the scale of respectability than a common "doss house," by reason of the fact that beds were only let by the week to regular customers); we had passed several suspicious-looking characters in the street, but our appetite for "copy" had been whetted; and there was such an air of truth about the old man's opening remarks, that, casting aside all fear of falling into the hands of thieves, we accepted his invitation. He opened the door and led the way, and presently we entered a large kitchen.

Then he appeared to lose himself in his surroundings, acting for the moment as if he had forgotten our existence. Tired, careworn, bowed with a mighty sorrow though he appeared at our first meeting, the "crushed" look on his face now appeared to deepen and become intensified. Walking over to the window, he carefully

uncovered a bird's cage and peered in, with the evident intention of satisfying himself as to the safety and welfare of its occupant.

"I wonder how long that will be spared to me," he muttered, musingly. Then, as though suddenly called to himself, he turned round.

"It is very good of you to sympathize with me," he continued, "but you don't know what I have gone through; you are unacquainted with my griefs, my sorrows and sufferings, the bitter burden which is really sometimes more than I can bear. When I have told you something of my history, you may perhaps then understand the despairing cry of a desolate old man to be allowed to die—to escape from a life which might have been, ah! so bright and happy."

Here his pen-up feelings overpowered him, and he cried—cried as we hope never again to see a man cry, his whole frame shaking with a paroxysm of grief which was distressing to witness.

He presently recovered, with an effort, and then we gently coaxed him to speak of the past.

"Ah well!" he began, "perhaps it may interest you to know that I have not always been compelled to try to earn a sort of living by selling newspapers in the street. At one time I had a large and prosperous business; everything seemed to go right with me those days."

"Take to drink? No, sir; that is one thing I am proud of—proud of even now. I have been a total abstainer ever since I was a lad. However, I had better begin my story at the beginning."

"I received a fairly good education, was put to business, and at the age of twenty-two found myself alone in the world, both my parents having then recently died—with a capital of less than a hundred pounds, fifty of this coming to me as the life savings of my father."

"Small as the sum was, I hoped by hard work and perseverance to make it the nucleus of a fortune. I did so—succeeded beyond my most sanguine expectations; yet today I have to be content to lose my identity in the name of 'Old Jimmy'—by which title I am now known—and to sell newspapers."

"Starting with a partner, who brought a like sum to my own into the business, I was wonderfully fortunate, although, like most beginners, I had at first a hard struggle. Then, without being hampered for capital, we considerably extended our operations, and the business increasing, we had a large building erected at our own expense purposely for the trade. At the end of ten years I bought my partner out; and it will give you some idea of our position when I mention that I paid him six thousand pounds as his half share. Poor fellow! He drank himself to death in two years. It was his ruin, going away from the business—and perhaps mine too."

"Well, during the following three years everything I touched seemed to turn to gold. Then, when I secured a position, I married the woman who had been my incentive to work; for whose sake I had entered on the struggle to wring a fortune from the world."

"To say I was madly happy would give you but a faint idea of my feelings at that time. I was surrounded by everything necessary to make life enjoyable, and certainly at that time believed it was but a natural reward of my former perseverance. However, such happiness as mine was, I suppose, too heavenly for mortals; it was too good to last."

"The first blow came, sudden and sharp. After less than two years of married life, during which period not a cloud dimmed the sunshine of our existence—my wife died; died in bringing a little girl into the world. The shock unmanned me—it unmanned me even now to think about that time," and his voice quivered, and tears stood in his eyes.

"Then," he continued, after gazing intently at the fire, as though seeing the picture his recollection had conjured up—"then Nature stepped in, and loss of reason lessened the poignancy of my grief. For nearly twelve months I was compelled to be away from business. Then my health began to improve; I again took a fresh interest in life, and hoped soon to forget my sorrow by working hard. As a recuperative, I went on a voyage to the Cape, and almost as soon as I arrived I was recalled home by the news that my manager had absconded. I returned. It was too true; and his delinquencies amounted to considerably over three thousand pounds. For nearly twelve months I was compelled to be away from business. Then my health began to improve; I again took a fresh interest in life, and hoped soon to forget my sorrow by working hard. As a recuperative, I went on a voyage to the Cape, and almost as soon as I arrived I was recalled home by the news that my manager had absconded. I returned. 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