THE FOWLER PRIZE ESSAY.

AN ESSAY

ON THE

Language and Genius of Burns

BY

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TOPICS.

THE

LANGUAGE AND GENIUS OF BURNS.

"Poetry", said Aristotle, "is more true than history." Nature's best as well as rarest gift to an age or country is the true poet. His province is not so much to gild truth as to ennoble it, and give it adaption to the highest wants of man's nature. The poet is a teacher. The matter of his instruction is reality, and that the highest; for he works the material of nature into forms of beauty, and makes his art the minister of his truth. Burns was such a gift to Scotland, and to the latter part of the eighteenth century. In an important sense his own did not receive him; yet they loved the *poet*. The kinships of poetic feeling is stronger than the barriers of prejudice, or of rank. Burns's were winning words for they spoke what in some feeble measure is struggling up for utterance in all hearts. Not a few in his own time saw in him a larger, freer, purer development of what they loved most in themselves. But Burns was larger than Scotland, or his own period. Jeffrey, in 1809 wrote "The name of Burns if we are not mistaken has not yet gathered all its fame." Sixty years have more than fulfilled this prophecy. Burns is now the poet of all English-speaking as well as Scotch-speaking people. The student of classic literature has appointed to him TamO'Shan-

ter, and The Cotter's Saturday Night, among the productions of genius to which he must devote his hours.

A sketch of the *life of Burns* will aid us in the study of his genius and language.

He was born in the parish of Alloway near Ayr, on the 25th of January 1759. In boyhood he did not win special attention as giving promise of the coming poet. He was grave and thoughtful, but not brilliant. At school he was known as having a good memory, and "a stubborn sturdy something" in his disposition. English was his favorite study, in which he made considerable progress before his thirteenth year. His school days however were few. The circumstances of his family made it necessary to deprive him of the advantages of education. He left the instruction of Campbell and Murdock, to become the pupil of toil. His strong, active frame early developed, made him a valuable assistant at home. At thirteen he held the plough, at fifteen he excelled in all the various labor of the farm.

The home of Burns, though an humble one, was one in which domestic harmony prevailed. There was poverty, fear, and sometimes want; but there was also affection, piety, and godly example, influences the most happy for nourishing, and culturing his nature. His father, William Burns, or Burness as he wrote it, was a man of that sterling stamp of character, which commands universal respect. What he thought to be right, he rigorously practiced, yet not so as to make duty a cross, nor the dutiful man a cynic; but with an air of grace, and freedom, and cheerfulness, which impressed others with the happiness of him who does right. Thus he was an example to lead his children, rather than a master to command them. He felt his manhood. There was a nobleness of nature in him that made him kind and considerate to inferiors, and respectful, but not cringing and passive to superiors. He was withal intelligent, industrious, and frugal. Few good men indeed are ever called on in the course of Providence to suffer such inconvenience from scanty livelihood, as he.

Robert's mother was a woman of little culture, but of great goodness. There was some tone of melody in her nature. Often

in his boyhood, she delighted Robert by singing the ballads of Scotland, while Betty Davidson, the old lady who lived in the family, kindled his young fancy with superstitious legends of witches, warlocks ghosts and fairies, so deeply impressing him, that a terror of these objects clung to him even in mature years.

Sixteen found the ploughboy a lover, and a poet. At this time the family removed to Lochlea, ten miles from Ayr, where the father had taken a larger farm. The life of Burns from this time to his twenty-third year was one of simplicity and sobriety. With all his work he found time for enlarging the sphere of his reading, which had previously been limited to the Life of Hannibal, and History of Sir Wm. Wallace. After this came his schooling at Irvine, where he learned mathematics, and also met smugglers and libertines. There is proof enough that the society of these seriously injured his morals. He had never before been familiar with "roaring dissipation," nor heard "illicit love talked of with the levity of a sailor." Then came the "unfortunate shift" of flax dressing; then the death of his father; then his return to a severer life of industry, with his brother Gilbert, on the farm at Mosquet. This was in 1783 in his twenty-fifth year. In 1787 he gave up the farm and made preparations for his departure to Jamaica. In the meantime his muse had not been idle. It was during these few months that he produced many of his best poems, among which are "The Cotters Saturday Night," "Halloween" "To a Mouse," "Man was made to Mourn," "The Twa Dogs," "Address to the Deil," and "The Jolly Beggars." Before leaving the country he was encourged to publish an edition of his poems. Six hundred copies were struck off at Kilmarnock, and from them he realized twenty pounds. He was on the point of starting from home, when a friend of his received a letter from Dr. Blacklock, which detained him and gave him hope that he would receive encouragement in Edinburg for a second edition. Accordingly he set out at once. A flattering reception awaited him. Wit, learning and beauty pressed around him with adulation. Prof. Dugald Stewart, Dr. Robertson, Dr. Gregory and McKenzie are a few of the eminent men whom he met. Eighteen months were spent in Edinburg, a large part of which Burns em-

ployed in social or convivial pleasure. From the edition of his poems there published, he realized five hundred pounds, two hundred of which he at once put to the use of relieving his mother and brother, who were still struggling on the farm. After this, in two or three successive tours, he visited the highlands and other interesting parts of his native land. In 1788 he rented a farm on the Nith, six miles from Dumfries. Thus somewhat settled in his plans, he married Jane Armour, the object of his early affections, as well as the victim of his early incontinence. He now sought to abandon his vices, to become industrious and acquire a home, where he might be independent. He had previously been recommended to the Board of Excise as gauger. The appointment was secured, and he was compelled to divide his time between the farm, and his official duties. The latter in fact received most of his energies. His associations led him back into convivial habits, he neglected his farm, and in 1791 gave it up, and removed to Dumfries. From this time till his death, 1796, his life was full of excitement and trouble. Here came that crushing conflict between his poetic tastes and inspirations, his tendency to indulgence, and his desire to be frugal and prosperous. Some injudicious expression of sympathy with the French Revolution surrounded him with more difficulties. At last his physical constitution gave way, he began to yield to disease, and, in July 1796, he died.

Burns died at thirty-seven, in the vigor of his years. With all the varied experience of his life, there is the same general complexion of character to the last. The one period in his life was that of youth. In so far as a settled purpose is an element of manhood, Pope was a man at sixteen, when he wrote his "Pastorals;" Burns was a youth at thirty-six. He had maturity, judgment, and rare powers of mind; but there was no decisive change. He was in effect without aim. He could not abandon poetry, nor could he give up the world. "The world," says Carlyle "still appears to him in borrowed colors."

I pass to a brief inquiry into the *History* and *Elements* of *Burns's Fame.*

We find that his genius came forth a wonder in the very beginning. The thinking men of his time gathered around him at Edinburg with tumultuous praise. Admiration was loud, and yet there was something vague about it, for these scholars would have every great man learned, and Burns was a rustic ploughman. He was a curiosity. His poetry likewise quickly touched the hearts of the people of Scotland. His journey to the Capital was a little triumph. No poetry indeed was ever so suddenly and universally popular. The edition was small, and the book was so eagerly sought, that where it was impossible to obtain copies of it, many of the poems were transcribed, and circulated through admiring circles to be read in manuscript. Burns found no Maecenas. Scotland had a Shakspeare, but not a Southampton. Burns's encouragement from the literati was transient. Their noisy praise soon subsided to indifference, from that passed to neglect, then to censure. The man had faults and frailties. These were strictly reckoned against him; as though Collins, or Dryden, or Shakspeare himself were all they should have been, in the strict account of manly character! Many good men found it hard to love Burns openly. Years after his death, those who honored themselves in becoming his biographers, handled his life with a kind of patronizing tenderness, as though conscious of stooping to a task the world would hardly expect them to do. But the time of clearing away has already passed. Time wears away prejudice, but not worth. Burns rests on his intrinsic merit; being regarded in sober judgment as a true poet, and a true man. His poems are, for the most part, fragments. There are traces of a purpose to write a drama, and surely his genius might have moulded the history of Wallace to a noble structure in art, but his life was too short for him to grapple with these themes in the fulness of his strength. His subjects are touched and lighted up with true poetic sentiment. These occasional effusions however, giving utterance to the feeling or the humor of the time, have a quality that makes them enduring. They are read and read again with increasing eagerness. The learned and the ignorant equally delight in them, wherever the English language is spoken.

Dr. Currie's edition of the year 1800, was the fifth, three having

been published before the death of Burns, one of 600 at Kilmarnock, one of 2800 at Edinburg, and one at Dumfries. The fourth came out in 1798. Since Dr. Currie's, it is scarcely possible to make any account of the editions. The number was estimated at more than one hundred a few years ago.

What unfailing excellence has given such rank and popularity to the poetry of Burns? It has come down side by side with the works of the greatest, yet the brightness of his fame does not lessen by comparison with any. Shakspeare's fame, if any, would eclipse his, for the brightest light that we can make is as darkness on the sun's disk; yet how alike were Burns and Shakspeare! There was in both the flash of the outset, prejudice, and in the case of Shakspeare a half century of oblivion, and after that the clearing away, and the march of their names to the eminence they now hold. Then there is the same excellence of truthfulness,—the same in quality I mean, not in scope. Shakspeare seems large enough to take in all truth, Burns not so broad, and universal in the range of his genius, but no less truthful—perhaps even more sincere. Burns knew his own heart, and told it. Shakspeare knew the great heart of nature, and was an oracle to speak her meaning. Shakspeare is profound in art; Burns's art is artless. We would fain think of the former as something more than man; Burns we know, by every sympathy of our common nature, was a man, every inch. The very simplicity of his effusion gives them a ready acceptance with that large class, who take no pleasure in the creations of Shakspeare.

This element of sincere truthfulness is the decisive merit in Burns. He writes because he has felt; and he writes just what he has felt. There is no working up unnatural sentiment, or overdrawn feeling. The passions come out almost alive, from a living heart. The scene is always where he has walked, or worked, or loved. This seems an easy excellence, but it is by no means a common one with the poets. They are apt to work above themselves, or else they have other selves not given in such measure to all men. Wordsworth, for example, who has himself been so severe in criticism of Burns, doubtless ate, drank,

and loved as others, but when he wrote ballads, he went into another self—the self of sentiment, the self of mind.

The working up of character for occasion, making men not as they are, but something better and grander than nature, is an insincerity of which no critic can accuse Burns. Tam O'Shanter and Souter Johnny are such men as we meet, and not like the Harolds and Philanders and Narcissas of literature—conceptions to the full mastery of which few rise besides the poets who create them. Burns is without affectation. Nothing intervenes to overcast his discernment of the true and false. He is self possessed. No ecstacy of creation or fancy can tempt him away from the simple truth.

The bounty of Burns' generous feeling is another quality which we cannot fail to note in his poetry. I might call it love; but we must distinguish between it, and those special attachments which formed so large a part of his experience. It is more universal. His heart seems to swell with affection for all nature. It is easy to love home, and friends and country, but the mouse, the sheep, the fowls, the daisy, the bridges of Doon, and even the Deil were to him objects of tender regard. From this springs the *humor* of Burns. It is a peculiar humor; not always the same, but ranging from mirth to love. I think the latter element prevails in it. His characters excite a genial, friendly interest. We feel tenderly toward them. The "Jolly Beggars," "Blythe Jenny," "The Frugal Wifie," "The Priest-Like Father" all appeal to our warm regard. With all Tam's faults, who does not feel a thrill deeper than of interest when it is said,—

> "Kings may be blest, but Tam was glorious,
> O'er a' the ills o' life victorious?"

I have not spoken of sterling energy of intellect. This might exist without poetic power, but poetic power rarely occurs without having this vigor of mind as one of its elements. Those who knew Burns, saw that in intellectual strength he was no ordinary man. Prof. Stewart says of him—"All the faculties of Burns's mind were, as far as I could judge, equally vigorous; and his prediction for poetry was rather the result of his own enthusias-

tic and impassioned temper, than of a genius exclusively adapted to that species of composition."

Aside from the tunefulness of his nature, and poetic imagination, he possessed the power of clear decisive conception. He strikes the key note of a character, or a scene at a glance. Hence his power of graphic description which many have thought his chief merit; hence also the rapid and often startling transitions that have been so much admired.

The patriotic sentiment that pervades Burns's poetry affords us another key to his popularity. He loved Scotia.

"O Scotia! my dear, my native soil!
For whom my warmest wish to Heaven is sent!"

"The story of Wallace" says he "poured a Scottish prejudice into my veins, which will boil along there, till the floodgates of life shut in eternal death." This love of country the more endears him to the people of other nations. It is one of the charms of his verse. It is remarkable, that in his time there was little patriotism in literature. It was, in fact, a prosy age, an age of metaphysics. The English had Cowper, but there had not been in Scotland a considerable poet for a score of years. Prose or poetry, English or Scotch, there was the same characteristic absence of patriotic sentiment. There was none of the good old home feeling. Glover, Gray, and Johnson, were cosmopolitan. They wrote in the world, not in England. So with Kames of Scotland. Hume lived at Edinburg, or at least studied there, but there is no local sentiment betrayed in his works. Robertson wrote the history of Scotland before he did that of Charles V, but aside from this incidental circumstance his writings, as those of Adam Smith, are without patriotic affection. With Burns begins a new era in literature in this respect. He is a *Scotch* poet, and the first of the modern Scotch poets. That pure freedom-loving spirit that was exhibited by the earlier poets, beginning with Barbour in his "Bruce," was rekindled in Burns, and burned with a warm glow. Scott followed, showing the same generous affection, Tannahill, singing of the same home subjects, then Campbell in whose "Pleasures of Hope," and Lyrics, we have many a rich offering at the shrine of country.

Before I undertake a minute discussion of Burns's language, I will say a few words about the *Scotch Language* in general.

I use this expression for it is a *language*, not a dialect, much less a corruption of the English. It is a separate growth from the common parent of the two Anglo-Saxon. The Scotch bears the marks of influences similar to those which contributed to the growth of the English. Scandinavian, French and Celtic are important elements, but these influences have operated in different degrees, and under different circumstances.

The early history of Scotland is somewhat obscure, or I had better say was obscure, for the language itself has thrown much light on the history, so that for our present philological purpose we need not complain of ignorance.

The Erse, still spoken in some parts of the highlands, is thought to have come down from the Scots, who crossed originally from Spain to Scotland, passing thence into Caledonia. Latin during the period of Roman dominancy—more than three centuries—made no change in it, any more than it did in the Celtic of England. In fact the Romans never went farther north than the Friths of Forth and Clyde. The Scots and Picts waged war with the Romans, and, after they retired from the Island with the Britons. Vortigern was obliged to call in aid against them, and in 449 A. D. the Saxon leaders Hengist and Horsa were invited to England. These with their followers eventually turned upon the Britons themselves, and the Saxons became established in the south. From this they spread into the west and north, settling Scotland as far as the Romans formerly had gone. The Celts were slain in great numbers. Those left alive either retired to the fastnesses, as in Wales; or became subject to the absolute sway of their conquerors. The only elements which their language contributed to either the Scoto-Saxon, or the Anglo-Saxon at this time, were geographical names, and words designating objects peculiar to the Celtic manner of life; the same class of words which the Indians have given us. Toward the close of the eighth century the inroads of the Scandinavian nations began. They continued nearly three centuries. Previously the language of the Lowlands was the same as that of Southern England; but

the introduction of Norse words and forms during the period of these invasions exhibits the first stage of departure. The effect was greatest in southern Scotland and northern England, as is shown even now by a comparison of the Scotch or the Northumberland and Yorkshire dialects of the English, with the London speech.

The Southern Saxons, at the Norman conquest 1066, became subject to William the Conqueror, and Norman French became the language of court, and of high life. Thus the Anglo-Saxon early received its great modifying influence. The transition was slow, occupying more than five centuries. The language passed through the periods known as Semi-Saxon, Old English, Middle English, that passing in the latter half of the sixteenth century, into Modern English.

The Northern or Scoto-Saxons, on the other hand, stubbornly and successfully resisted the Normans. They kept themselves separate. With more or less of feudal vassalage in the early period, and of commercial and literary intercourse later, this separation was maintained till James VI of Scotland became James I of England. But in the meantime, there were important political developments that have left their record with great distinctness on the Scotch language.

At the death of Alexander III, 1283, Princess Margaret became heir to the throne. She was affianced to Edward's son, the Prince of Wales. Had that marriage been consummated, doubtless Scotland and England would then have been united; but the Princess died. Baliol and Bruce then became competitors for the throne. They submitted their claims to Edward, who decided in favor of Baliol, on condition that he become a vassal of the English King. Baliol grew restive under this vassalage, and when, 1292, war broke out between France and England, he refused his aid to the latter, and concluded a treaty of alliance with France. War with England, of course, followed. Baliol was defeated. Scotland's struggles for independence followed—the efforts of the patriotic Wallace, and of Robert Bruce, descendent of the former Bruce—by whose heroism and love of liberty the independence

of Scotland was finally achieved,—the struggle closing triumphantly at the battle of Bannockburn, 1314.

From the alliance with France, a free and friendly intercourse sprung up between the two countries. From this we readily understand the circumstances under which the French element came into the language. In England it was from necessity. In Scotland from choice. The Scoto-Saxon was modified, not only by the introduction of French words, but much of the mind and habit and taste peculiar to France seems to have infused itself into the Scotch-speaking people.

The change was also more rapid. The language of the early poets as Barbour and James I, is more like the modern English, than that of their contemporaries in England, as Gower and Chaucer; only for the reason that the former had already introduced a larger proportion of French.

I have said nothing about the influence of Scotch and English on each other. The tendency through the whole period of their growth has been to assimilation. There have been causes acting to prevent this, chief among which, perhaps is pride. The Scotch particularly have clung to their vernacular. Up to the beginning of this century the offence of "anglicising" even in circles of rank and learning, would meet a ready rebuke. Relatively, the English has been the first in importance, of all the languages of Great Britian. Since the Elizabethan or "golden age" of English literature, this preeminence has been more and more marked; so that the prevailing tendency of the Scotch and others has been toward English. At the present time not only the learned and wealthy, but also the middle class Scotch are forgetting the speech of their ancestors.

One cannot become, in any degree, familiar with the Scotch language without being impressed with its beauty, as well as its expressive energy. At first sight there is something hard, and angular about it. It is eminently a language of common life, and of men and women in common life who think. The words are literally full of meaning. There are no margins of useless sound, that can be swayed to euphonious condences; and yet how musical it is! Such grace, such a natural, easy and tuneful flow that

it has long been the language of *song*. If a speech, in itself, aside from the just combination of its elements in writing, can be called picturesque, the Scotch is so in a high degree. Burns used it, because the home speech would throw a local environment around the creations of his muse; but chiefly I think because it was natural and expressive. There are many words that have no adequate rendering in English. Even in his letters Burns must sometimes turn aside to the home idiom to express something to which he cannot adapt the English phrase.

In discussing more particularly the *language* of *Burns*, I shall confine myself, for the most part, to Tam O'Shanter.

This poem contains 1494 words counting repetitions. Of these 51 are proper names, or repetitions of them, leaving 1443, of which I take account in the following particulars.

Of the whole number 266, or little more than 18 per cent. are peculiar, and require special notice. I cannot more conveniently introduce them, than by dividing them into two classes. The first class embraces 95 words, for which the English reader must ordinarily consult the glossary. Many of these have never found their way into English: the rest are nearly all obsolete. 52 are of Anglo-Saxon origin, 15 are from the Celtic, 7 from the French, 6 from the German, 5 from the Latin, 10 from the Scandinavian. Examples are,—

"When Chapman billies leave the street."

Chapman: *A.S.; peddler, a man who cheapers; in English only as a proper name.

Billies: Probably diminutive of Bill—nickname for William, and familiarly applied to boys of that mode of life, as we call any sailor "Jack."

"While we sit bousing at the nappy,
An' getting fou and unco happy."

Nappy: A. S.; ale; literally heady, Eng. knob, and knop, hence in drink that which goes to the head.

Unco: A. S.; very, elsewhere as a noun; strange things, as,—

"Each tells the uncos that he sees or hears."

* Anglo-Saxon.

(Cotter's Saturday Night.) Eng. uncouth; literally unknown; hence unusual, strange, very.

"Ah, gentle dames! it gars me greet,"

Gars: Scand., makes; Eng., gears.

Greet: Scand., weep.

"The hour approaches Tam maun ride;"

Maun: A. S., (magan); must; Eng., may.

There has been a drift both in meaning, (magan, to be able) and in sound. Scotch has strengthened, we have weakened the meaning; while in sound the word has worn away in both. English has weakened the palatal g to y. Scotch has lost it altogether.*

It would be interesting to go through the entire list of these words, but the value of the discussion would centre chiefly on tracing the meaning, origin and etymological equivalents in our language, and as this is a work within the reach of any reader who feels an interest in it, I shall not give space to it.

The second is a more numerous class of words, and though the forms are unusual, the English reader readily recognizes them. These words exhibit and illustrate some of the most important principles that operate in the growth, and modification of speech. The same word in Anglo-Saxon, (for the words of this class are all of Anglo-Saxon origin) went into Scotch and English; and in process of time and use suffered change in both; in some cases the Scotch exhibiting one line of departure, and the English another; in others both exhibiting the same general principle of change, but in different degrees.

I shall first take up the vowel changes. The general principles with reference to vowel changes, seen in all languages, are, first, they weaken in long periods. The strong, full sounds, as †â û ô shift to the weaker sounds o ê e î. The cause must be sought in ease of utterance and that large class of influences which affect the organs of speech, as climate, habits, culture &c. Secondly, the influence of accent. Sound gravitates to the syllable or word which receives stress: hence, under the accent vowels

* See same in "een," A. S. eagen, Eng. eyes.

† I indicate sounds merely without regard to the letters used in any case—and by the Continental power of letters—thus á as in father; é as in prey; í as in machine.

strengthen, in unaccented syllables they weaken. The former philologists call progression, the latter precession. Thirdly, vowels sounds change under the influence of other sounds. A coming sound is anticipated and the conception of it tends to bring the organs to the position appropriate for its utterance. This change in the organs or parts of them , modifies the sound which is in process of enunciation, producing *umlaut*, *breaking*, or *assimilation* according to the nature of the anticipated sound.

One set of words exhibit a change from a parent â to ê in Scotch, to ô in English. Ang-Sax. hâm. Scotch hame. English home. The latter is an example of progression, the former, shifting. So common a change is this that I note twenty-three cases of it in Tam O'Shanter, viz.—"hame" (*2) "Sae" (3) "ain" (3). "rair," "lades," "Stane" (4), "ghaists", "bane" (2), "sair," "haly," "rape" (rope) "baith," "mair," "drave."

"And drouthy neebors neebors meet."

Neebors: A. S., neahbur. Eng., Neighbor; ea under the accent strengthens—i. e. its latter element is lightened more, and more till it disappears as in Eng. nêbor. The same process of gravitation is carried still further in Scotch. The vowel e=a+i ;† by progression, the former element is obscured leaving i–nîbor, represented in Scotch by ee.

"Whyles holding fast his guid blue bonnet."

Guid: A. S., gôd. Eng., good. O=a+u; by progression, prominence given to the latter element, the former lost; hence Eng. gud, (oo). In Scotch the process goes on, u passing into i umlaut (ui) equivalent to the French u, a sound which we never have brought into our language.

"Whyles crooning o'er some auld Scots sonnet."

Auld: A. S., âld. Eng., old. Â by progression strengthens to o in English. Breaking (prefixing a parasitic vowel to a, by the movement of the organs in anticipation of the

* The figures in parentheses show the number of repetitions in Tam O'Shanter.

† e=a plus i only in the sense that it is between them and may change to one or the other as it is under the influence of accent, or the want of it. The vowel are only points fixed by habits of language in a sliding scale of sound made by the flow of vocalized breath. The range is from û to i thus u o à â ê i. This represents only points on the scale. They shade into each other. The extremes of the scale u & i together with â—a sound made by vocalizing breath with mouth open and organs at rest, are called simple vowels, others mixed e=a plus i, o=a plus u, &c.

trill, l) seems to have been the first change in Scotch. In fact we find the form eâld, in Anglo-Saxon. This combination would by gravitation interchange with eo, and continuing the influence of gravitation would obscure e, and give distinctness to both elements of o; hence "auld" (5), "tauld" (2), "cauld."

"Been Snaw-white seventeen hunder linen."

Snaw: (2) A. S., snâw. Eng., Snow. The labial w assimilates â, i. e. causes it to tend toward the labial vowel u. A and o both mark stages of progress from â to u; o is nearest to it. So "shawed," and "blawn."

"This truth fand honest Tam O'Shanter."

Fand: A. S., inperf. fand. pass. part. fund– Eng., found. Of the two forms the Eng. preferred fund; then by gravitation the factor a, was prefixed to u, a strengthening of frequent occurrence, as in hûs becoming house; mûs, mouse; &c. Scotch preferred the form fand, and holds it.

"Wi' twa pund scots (twas a' her riches.")

Pund: A. S., pund. Eng., pound; obviously a case like the above, except that there is but one form in the original.

"And coost her duddids to the Wark."

Wark: A. S., weorc, worc; Eng.; work. O=a+u. English takes one element, Scotch the other; or if we suppose the words to have come from the form which has breaking, we have eo from which to derive û and â; eo is an unstable combination tending to û as in English, also interchanging with ea, which in turn tends by precession to â, as in Scotch "wark."

"Wham," "twa" (2), "wha," hold the original sound while the corresponding English words have strengthend to û. We seem, in thought, to have placed the w after the vowel, where it has produced assimilation shifting the vowel to the libial u. "Nae" (9), "frae" (5), "mither," "brither," "anither," "bleeze" (2) "ane," "ae" (7), "ance," "weel," will be readily recognized according to principles already illustrated as weakenings from the parent forms. This discussion might

be carried to any length, embracing as well the words which are alike in Scotch and English; as those which, having different forms, exhibit the operation of influences different in kind or degree; but I have only sought to illustrate the general method of tracing these changes.

I note in passing a few cases of figuration.

Syncope, e. g. "ev'n," "ev'ry," "glow'ring," "pow'r."

Ecthlipsis, e. g. "o' ", "wi' ", "gie' ", (give,) "awfu' ", "fu' ", "an' ". (and), "a' " (all), "hersel' ", "comin' ", "ta'e' ", "e'en", "de'il", "gi'en", "cour" (cover), "smoor" (smother).

These examples illustrate a striking peculiarity of the Scotch, viz: the habit of dropping strong consonants. This peculiarity affords another confirmation of the historical fact already alluded to, viz: the friendly intercourse of the French and Scotch through the early period of the language. The same letter-dropping tendency characterized the French in their use of the Latin as the basis of their present speech.

Among other changes involving consonants, I note, weakening of s to r, as "Thir", A.S., thâs, Eng.; these. Assimilation, as "flannen" for flannel, and perhaps "siller" for silver. Shifting, in English, to the aspirated, or perhaps, more probably, assibilated forms, where the Scotch holds the smooth palatal of the parent Saxon, as "kirk", Eng.: church, "birk", Eng.; birch; "bunker", Eng.; bench, (though we also have bank and bunk); "breeks", Eng., breeches; "skirl", Eng., shrill, (metathesis of r); "meikle", Eng., much; "sic" Eng., such, &c. This change is the result of a device to promote ease of utterance, and grew up primarily from the difficulty of sustaining the dental and palatal articulation of t, and c (k) when followed by i.*

One of Burns's sterling merits is the use of a large proportion of Anglo-Saxon words. This is the element that gives simplicity as well as strength and vigor to our language, and it is the same with the Scotch. I find on examining four representative passages of Tam O'Shanter containing one hundred words each,

*See March's Anglo Saxon Grammar, Art. 34.

that the average percentage of Anglo-Saxon words is 88.5. The same number of words in Shakspeare's Julius Caesar gives 87 per cent.; from Bunyan's Pilgrims Progress 90.5 per cent; while the same number from the New Testament gives 92.5 per cent. The songs of Burns exhibit a still more favorable result. I have examined two—"Auld Lang Syne", and "John Anderson, My Jo", and find the percentage of Anglo-Saxon to be 95.6. "O are ye Sleeping Maggie"—one of the most popular of Robert Tannahill's songs, gives a percentage nearly as great. There is something in the very nature of a song that gives us a key to this difference. It is for the common people. The writer may have the keenest intellect, the broadest vision, and bring to his aid the finest culture, and yet be found wanting, for his verse is for the singer, not the reader; for the ploughboy in the furrow, for the maiden at the household toil; so that it must make articulate the thought and the feeling which lies nearest the common heart. This can only be accomplished by the use of the folk speech, which contains a much larger proportion of Anglo-Saxon, than the more polished language of literary circles. The songs of Burns, we have seen show most Anglo-Saxon; the miscellaneous poems stand next, including "Tam O'Shanter", "The Twa Dogs" &c., though I think the "Cotter's Saturday Night" should come after them, and the letters, last of all.

Tam O'Shanter we are told was Burns's favorite. Byron called it the "magnum opus" of Burns. It has had almost universal favor, and is now popularly considered among the first, if not the first of his poems. It was the work of a single day, though the materials of the poem were doubtless wrought into the poets nature in boyhood. He had abundant opportunity at Kirkoswald, to observe the habits of the Carrick farmers, and the carousals of Graham, O'Shanter were among the incidents that deeply impressed him. Add to this the stories of witches warlocks and ghosts with which his fancy was fed in early life, and we have all that was necessary for Tam O'Shanter, except the genius of Burns, and the occasion. The latter came in the well known suggestion of Capt. Grose, the antiquarian.

The poem is one of 229 lines*. The metre is the common octosyllabic or iambric tetrameter. In structure it exhibits great fertility of resources for heightening poetic effect. I note a few briefly.

Frequent use of incorporated clauses ; as

"Kings may be blest, but Tam was glorious,
O'er a' *the ills o' life victorious.*"

Repetition of subject and object, as,,

"Her *Cutty-Sark* o' Paisly harn,
* * *
It was her best, and she was vaunty.

Thir *breeks* o' mine, my only pair,
* * *
I wad hae gi'en *them* aff my hurdies,"

"As he frae *Ayr* ae night did canter,
Auld *Ayr* wham ne'er a town surpasses."

The use of the accusative of price, as

"Tam did nae mind the storm *a whistle.*'!

"Fair Play he cared na Deils a *Bodle.*"

Following the positive by the comparitive in lively description as—

"The piper *loud* and *louder* blew ;
The dancers quick and quicker flew."

The use of onomatopoetic words ; as,—

"The night drave on wi' sangs and *clatter*,"

"The storm without might *rair* and *rustle*,"

"As bees *biz* out wi' angry fyke,"

These words indicate in their utterance the objects to which they are applied, and thus contribute to the life of the action, and the vividness of description.

Alliteration: This figure occurs very frequently. I count fifty cases in "Tam O'Shanter", and forty eight in "The Cotter's

* Four lines not commonly inserted in the books are these,—
"Three lawyer's tongues turned inside out,
Wi' lies seamed like a beggars clout ;
And Priests' hearts rotten, black as muck,
Lay stinking, vile, in every neuk."

Saturday Night". This was the characteristic poetical form of Anglo-Saxon, and is an important one in most languages. The effect is very pleasing. It steals over the reader with an influence so quiet, and vague, thet he scarcely knows what produces it. I give only a few lines as examples.

"Where *s*its our *s*ullen, *s*ulky dame."

"A *bl*ethering *bl*ustering drunken *bl*ellum"

"Nae man can *t*ether *t*ime or *t*ide,"

"For ae *b*link o' the *b*onnie *b*urdies."

Of other poetical figures* the simile is perhaps the most important. Those in the passage beginning—

"But pleasures are like poppies spread,"

are famous, and rarely excelled for beauty, especially the second—

"Or like the snow falls in the river,
A moment white—then melts forever."

Burns has himself, but once outdone it, in "Mary in Heaven".—

"Time but the impression deeper makes,
As streams their channels deeper wear."

Aside from these merits in the structure, Tam O'Shanter abundantly exhibits Burns's wealth in the poet's resources. It abounds in graphic description. A couplet is often enough for a picture full of the most substantial and pleasing elements. I forbear to quote illustrations; for I should not know when to stop.

The humor surpasses any other merit of the poem, in its richness and felicity. It is that peculiar humor of which I have spoken before. Tam is the person from whose character and adventures it is chiefly developed, a character, too, about which we would think it to be most difficult to throw an interest so far removed from either censure or pity. One can easily despise or commiserate the man who yields himself such a ready victim to sensual indulgence. We feel a ready sympathy, at the outset for Kate.—

"Gathering her brows like gathering storm,"
Nursing her wrath to keep it warm."

and yet Tam calls out in his own behalf, a genial regard, so that

* There occurs the metaphor.—as "That hour o' nights black arch the Keystane"

in the progress of the story, the mere mention of his name is enough to fill us with a glow of friendly mirth.

Then as to the emotions, the poet seems to draw upon every fountain of feeling in the human heart. From mere interest we are led into the most intense sympathy. On the one hand, the poet calls out our resentment; on the other, he takes us through every phase of benevolence. When the "reaming swats," so inspire Tam, that he "cares na Deils a bodle", we must laugh; but when the muse takes up philosophy, and reasons of the vanity of worldly pleasure, we must be grave. What exquisite touches of tenderness there are!

"Ah gentle dames! It gars me greet."

It is too little to say this is pathetic. It is *pathos itself*. This fervor of universal sympathy bodies itself forth even in the words. There are more than a score of diminutives in Tam O'Shanter, and these with Burns almost invariably express endearment.

The description of the storm rises to the sublime:—

"The rattling showers rose on the blast;
The speedy gleams the darkness swallowed:
Loud, deep and lang the thunder bellowed."

"Tam skelpit on through dub and mire", but as he nears Kirk Alloway, "were ghaists and howlets nightly cry", dread creeps over him; the "ford", the "birks", the "meikle stane" the "whins" the "cairn," the "thorn aboon the well"; each has its frightful history, which Tam knows to well; then the "unco sight",—the horrors revealed by the light which "each held in his cauld hand"; all this terrifies Tam, but not the reader. If Burns meant to rouse this feeling in us, here is form, without life or power. But Burns did not mean this. The feelings which he stirs, are those which well up in his own soul, and he did not believe in witches. We are still farther removed from the sway of these terrible superstitions; yet human nature is the same, and that mysterious chord, which once thrilled only at this touch, still feebly vibrates at it. We can enter into Tam's emotions, enough to be in sympathy with him, while for ourselves we smile with patronizing incredulity. This was the poet's purpose. Tam O'Shanter, viewed as a work of art, is a masterly carricature of

witchcraft. The moral shows this, and in no work of his, except the Cotter's Saturday Night, does it more plainly appear than in Tam O'Shanter, that Burns was one of those, who in their writings, "do labor to better the manners of men, and through the sweet bait of their numbers to steal into the young spirits a desire of honor and virtue."*

In Burns we have another memorable instance of the affinity, which has ever subsisted between poverty, and the muse. He was rich in passion and song, but poor in the wealth that men count, and weigh, and measure. He was born so. Doubtless Burns would have had it otherwise. One cannot escape the impression that the reconcilement of himself to his worldly position was the end toward which he struggled vaguely, but unsuccessfully.

To ask what he might have been, had he lived in more favorable circumstances, would be to engage in unprofitable, and perhaps, uncharitable conjecture. A more interesting question presents itself in the *Influence* of these *circumstances* in the *development* of his *genius*.

To begin with, there was the motive to effort to which his poverty gave rise. True, he was "no mercenary bard". A wonderful pride characterized him. Independence was his life thought, yet Burns was the man who would have enjoyed social rank, and the means of maintaining it, had it been offered him as that which he justly earned by his poetic genius. But I speak now of mere livelihood. This consideration does not, or should not degrade our estimate of what he has produced. Men must be other than flesh and blood, when there is no gross element in their motives. If we search, we may find it lurking under, and marring the worthiness of the noblest actions. I say this not in dispraise of human nature, but in the observation of it. A man's motives admit of as many elements as he has desires, by which he can be appealed to. The whole field of literature presents few instances of the exercise of creative power, where we may not trace a greater or less degree of incitement, derived from some of the conditions of our lower nature. Sir W. Scott wrote many of his nov-

*Edmund Spenser.

els, confessedly, to get money. Addison composed the "Campaign", celebrating the victory of Blenheim, for little else than court favor. It is no secret why Johnson wrote "Rasselas"; indeed all the works of this eminent scholar, except the "Lives of the Poets," were prepared before he received his pension, while want was the ever present stimulus. But there would not soon be an end, were we to cite even the familiar cases that illustrate this fact. We cannot trace the influence of this motive distinctly with Burns. His works are not more silent than his life. A certain vague, indefinable something was before him; he called it independence. It was not material competency, nor wholly social respectability; for these, it seems, he might have had, had they been the end of his undivided wish. His independence was ideal. He looked to men for it, yet was too proud to take from them any element of it. He sought out of himself what he could find in largest measure only *in* himself and in God. This ideal liberty never realized, still buoyed, thrilled and inspired him. It was not the mere aim to subsist, for when, at last, this bare continuance of life became the only question, his life became a melancholy burden to him, yet that there was this element in his motive, we cannot question.

Again we must consider that Burns, in undertaking to write, was comparitively without those restraints which culture, and a liberal acquaintance with literature impose. Gray studied much, but wrote little, for he loved reading better than writing; and universally, he who has an ample library, together with time and taste to use it, will find well said, what he would otherwise have attempted to say himself. I am far from saying that Burns was merely a man of poetic taste, and that relish for the creations of others could, under any circumstances, have repressed his "divinity of soul". His genius was original, decided, irrepressible. I refer to the absence of any restraint of this character. His reading, as we have seen, was meager, especially up to the publication of his first volume af poems.

As to the subjects which Burns has chosen, they are the objects, incidents, and experiences of humble life. It might not have been otherwise with his choice of subjects, had he been a

nobleman; for poetry is within a man, not without; at least it is the power within him to discern the ideal world around him. But circumstances have much to do with the poets knowledge of this subject, as well as his sympathies for it. None could talk to the daisy as the poet ploughman, whose share made it droop. No one in the higher walks, would be so impressed with the every day incidents of a life of labor.

Besides this there are the marks of his plain humble life in the character, and execution of his poems, their simplicity, their artless grace. There is no straining for finish, no labored elevation of imagery. His elegance is not that of elaborated fancy, nor polished diction; indeed, we need have little to say about elegance. It is a surface merit. Burns must be tried and judged by the qualities that reach the heart. The blunt honesty of nature characterized him. Every experience or feeling he has portrayed, as well as every character he has drawn, bears the stamp of truth. His humble realities are put forth in the simplicity of nature, only that he has looked upon them with eyes quick, and searching to discern, and a heart warm to love. Perhaps I ought to note in this connection, what seems to me the only exception to the general characteristic of which I have now spoken,—"The Cotter's Saturday Night". It bears the marks of care and study. An unwonted gravity pervades it. It moves along with such just proportion, such regularity of pause and measure, such equal, soft, yet heavy condences, that one can almost fancy he is reading the stanzas of Pope or Gray. Yet how evidently this "gem" reveals the impressions received by Burns in his father's humble cottage! There was a peculiar fitness in the nourishment he received from the rugged scenes of youth, from the cares and fears from the varied joys, hopes, and loves, that tutored him to give voice to all the experiences of common life.

Burns's poverty in its results went beyond his own development, to the social relations of men. He felt that the genius of his country had a high mission for him. It came to the plough to mantle him with robes of prophecy. Independence was his sentiment. No man was above him, except in the accident of birth, or wealth, and even such well knew, that in Burns they

had a peer. His was a time when men were esteemed by the position they held, and position was a purchase, the price of which was, not character, but riches or learning. Society wanted revolution. Manhood must become the basis of social estimation. But what a work was this, to change the order of things in society! How shall it be accomplished? Not by popular uprising; that would do in government, but in social reform, the power must be a peaceful one. The face of things must be changed by the silent progress of exemplified principle. The prophet must come from lowly pursuits, be schooled by toil and suffering, quickened in every sympathy, deepened by every affection, gladdened by every humor of his kind, and, above all, must have the innate idea of independence, wrought up to a consciousness of absolute equality with all men. He must have unction, and power to teach men what they are worth. We of this time can look beyond the frailties of Burns's character, and see that there was in him some fitness for this work. In intellect, he was among the most capable; yet it was not intellect, nor the effluence of wisdom, that best fitted him for his social mission. He was a poet. This was much, but not enough. That he was gifted to take up the sturdy speech of low life, and make these strong words the ministers of poetic utterance, and that his muse did not seek swelling themes, but stayed at home, tunefully celebrating the scenery which poor men see around them; would account for the people's love for him, and more, it is reason enough, why peasant life, once despised, is now raised to such rank of romantic esteem, that it is honored and endeared; reason enough, why a thousand little every-day objects, and experiences, once unnoticed, are now cherished, because Burns saw, and felt; because he lingered, loved, and sang. But it is in the spirit and meaning of his poems, and his life, that we read his plea for social rights. He proclaimed the true dignity of man, without respect to wealth, office, or rank. His sturdy manliness of mind, everywhere exhibited, educates peasants to the apprehension of higher and nobler views of man's condition and resources. The sentiment which he embodied in,—

"A man's a man for a' that."

was a strange one then, But Burns spoke it boldly, as one inspired; and now this thrill of the consciousness of freedom and equality, is leavening the bottom of society wherever English literature finds its way.

Burns was, in himself, a sufferer by all that keenness of insight which enabled him to read men. Peasants, rich men, wits, philosophers, he saw little difference between them. He would have classed them together, on his broad basis of essential rights and resources; yet he could not fail to see, that society made these adventitious circumstances the basis of great distinctions. Had he only saw it, it would have been well; but he felt it. His nature was one of the most sensitive. He, untutored in the "jargon o' your schools," raised himself from the lowest, to a level with the highest; but it was upon no merit that the great would steadily recognize. There was ever looming up before him, the unfounded inequalities in the social conditions of men. Perhaps it was a fault that he repined at this, for he did repine, and to this I think may be attributed his melancholy, and his intemperate habits.

Burns lacked the back bone of purpose. His life was the "blind groping of Homer's Cyclops round the walls of his cave." The times come with most men, when they go forth to struggle, afterwards, for some single definite object. It is the crisis—the meridian moment, or rather, I should say, the dawn moment when all the machinery of progressive action stands still, when the intelligence goes backward to glean, and forward to prophesy; then masses the energies of the man on the chosen course. To this purpose we can trace every change and achievement. This seems the grandest thing there is about a man. But the crisis never came with Burns, or rather his life was one long crisis. There was intelligence enough, gathering enough, but it never took on that development and culmination which leads to purpose. His life was a great basis, on which a mighty edifice of character might have been erected, but it was cut off unfinished. Some look upon it with censure, some with praise, all with pity; for the friendly eye sees many an ample tendency stretching away to that perfect symmetry, larger than self, broader than home or country, limited only by the bounds which God marked out when he made man.