

The Politics of Burns¹

THIS discourse, whatever result it may come to, is certainly not wrong in its choice of a subject. To think of the politics of Robert Burns is not like some of the idle and irrelevant enquiries about the lives of poets. In every current opinion about him, in every judgment passed on him since the year 1786, he is taken as a representative man, speaking for his nation, or for the rank he belongs to, or for some new reviving spirit of liberty, or for the old traditional Scottish loyalty, or for these two together, as Jacobin-Jacobite.

Of his loyalty to the house of Stuart there can be no doubt, and there is no doubt that he was affected by the spirit of the French Revolution. But neither of these motives made the real politics of Burns. The French Revolution counted for very little in the poetry of Burns, for the good reason that in 1786 the French Revolution was not yet in sight, at any rate from the horizon of Mauchline. It is not wonderful that readers of the life of Burns (in any version of it) should be struck by the story of his later days, and the difficulties of the excise-man who admired the French, and sent them those historical caronnades.

The difficulties are well described by Carlyle:

'Meteors of French politics rise before him; is he not a well-wisher of the French Revolution, a Jacobin, and therefore in that one act guilty of all?' 'These accusations' (Carlyle goes on) 'it has since appeared, were false enough: but the world hesitated little to credit them.'

And later, we may add, long after the suspicions and jealousies of Dumfries, when Burns's opinions about France have little left in them to irritate the most sensitive Tory, there is another kind of exaggeration connecting Burns and the French Revolution through the Spirit of the Age. You will find this superstition in Matthew Arnold's essay on Gray: 'If Gray, like Burns, had been

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just 30 when the French Revolution broke out, he would have shown perhaps productiveness and animation in plenty.'

Now this means evidently that Burns lived in a time of expansion, and had the advantage of this expansion or explosion in his poetical fertility, as contrasted with the small volume of Gray's poems. It is true that Burns was born in 1759, and therefore was 30 in 1789; it is true also that the explosion reached his mind. But what had it to do with the Kilmarnock edition of 1786, or the Edinburgh of 1787? And how much of Burns's poetry was written after the explosion of 1789? That sentence of Matthew Arnold may, I think, be worth noting in an historical society, as an example of one of the Idols of the Theatre, one of the fallacies besetting historical study, especially, I should say, the history of literature. The Spirit of the Age is a dangerous demon, and I cannot but think he has imposed on Matthew Arnold in this reference to Burns. The poems of Burns in which he gave his rendering of Ayrshire life; the poems which made his fame at once, through all the length of the Island of Britain, were published before the French Revolution; and further, they show no signs of the coming expansion. The politics of Burns are not, in 1786, affected by the great things coming on; if there is any high spirit in his politics, and there is much, it is derived from the time of Gray; the time of depression, as Matthew Arnold counts it. If one is to borrow metaphysical aid to interpret the poetical genius of Burns, why not take the 'freits,' as we may call them here, which will be interpreted 'omens,' if this argument is ever repeated in South Britain, why not take the freits from his birth year of 1759?

It is not less significant, that date, than 1789; it is the 'wonderful year,' of 'Hearts of Oak,' of Minden and Quebec and Quiberon. Burns knew well enough what that year meant, and his hero is William Pitt, Earl of Chatham, and also, for the father's sake chiefly, William Pitt, the son:

‘An’ Will’s a true guid fallow’s get,
A name not envy spairges.’

There you have the politics of Burns in 1786, when he was at the height of his power. It is obvious enough, but seems generally to lack interest for readers of Burns. Yet surely there is something worth considering in the fact, which Scott is one author to note clearly, that Burns for a time was a Pittite:

‘You will see he plays high Jacobite . . . though I imagine

his Jacobitism, like my own, belonged rather to the fancy than the reason. He was, however, a great Pittite down to a certain period.'

Burns shows an extraordinary gift for finding out all that he wants to know, and he must have wanted to know everything about the Pitts, or he could not have found out Boconnock in Cornwall, the house of the Pitts—regarding which I remember Mr. Phillimore spoke some pleasant things some years ago on a 25th of January—if the newspapers of the 26th are to be trusted. I am sorry I was not there to hear.

There are several points here all at once calling for notice, and seldom getting it from friends of the poet :

The extraordinary talent for history shown by Robert Burns.

His attention to British History in preference to Scottish.

The originality of his views.

He is not fascinated at this time by Charles James Fox. At any rate in his political choice and aims and admirations he refuses to be swayed by the passionate eloquence or the liberal ideas of the statesman with whom we should think he might have had most sympathy. He celebrates him later.

Further, and this perhaps when one comes to look into it is the strangest thing of all, his clear, original and careful study of British politics is carried on through the time when his poetical studies are most closely limited to the country he knows—not Scotland, but Ayrshire, and not the whole of Ayrshire.

To understand the politics of Burns it is necessary to think of his position with regard to the scene and the substance of his poetry—the poetry of 1786 and 1787, to which he never added another volume of the same sort in the ten years remaining, and scarcely a poem except *Tam o' Shanter*.

How did Burns come to write the Kilmarnock volume? This problem may be hard to answer, and it is possibly foolish. But there are some misconceptions about his circumstances and education, and his place in literature, which must be cleared away. Carlyle gives his authority to some of these in his review of Lockhart, and his lecture on the Hero as Man of Letters:

'With no furtherance but such knowledge as dwells in a poor man's hut, and the rhymes of a Fergusson or Ramsay for his standard of beauty.'

Now we know that his standard of beauty was formed in part upon the rhymes of Ramsay and Fergusson, but we know that it was influenced also by Pope and Steele and Beattie's work, by

Shakespeare and Milton, by Thomson, Shenstone, and Gray and Goldsmith. You can tell a man by his quotations; he quotes *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Troilus and Cressida*. He writes to Mrs. Dunlop of his recourse to the dramas of Thomson. He quotes to Clarinda from Gray's *Bard*:

‘Dear as the light that visits these sad eyes,
Dear as the ruddy drops that warm my heart.’

Is not the standard of beauty there?

Carlyle on Burns again, in *Hero-Worship* :—

‘This Burns appeared under every disadvantage; uninstructed, poor, born only to hard manual toil; and writing, when it came to that, in a rustic special dialect, known only to a small province of the country he lived in. Had he written even what he did write in the general language of England, I doubt but he had already become universally recognised as being, or capable to be, one of our greatest men.’

I am not quite sure what Carlyle means by a rustic special dialect, known only to a small province of the country he lived in. Of course the language of Kyle and Carrick has peculiarities of its own. Burns does not write exactly the same language as the Scottish poets of Lothian and the Mearns; there are words and phrases in Fergusson, and also let me say for the pleasure of naming them, in *Hamewith* and in *Horace of the Ochils*, that are not found in Burns. The language of Ross of Lochlee, in *Helenore, the Fortunate Shepherdess* (*Lindy and Nory*), must have been strange to Burns, though probably more familiar to his father and his Montrose cousins, but it was no great hindrance to his understanding and appreciation of ‘Lindy and Nory’; and as for readers in the South, it was in England that he found at once some of his most enthusiastic admirers, among some of the most fastidious and most purely Southern in taste and breeding. I mean particularly William Gilpin, the careful and delightful student of the picturesque, who, if any one, might have been offended by Scotch drink, Scotch religion and Scotch manners. Instead of which Gilpin, the refined and elegant, chooses precisely from a poem on Scotch drink a stanza for the death of a hero, and he quotes it at Killiecrankie for an epitaph on Dundee. Coleridge in the *Friend* makes a similar use of the same context, without the particular reference, though decorously he omits the line :

‘Clap in his cheek a Highland gill.’

Wordsworth, speaking of the death of Dundee in one of his early poems, shows that he had read Gilpin, and had read Burns as quoted by Gilpin, and did not disapprove:

‘When brave Dundee with ‘faint huzzas’ expired.’

It is curious.

There are selections from Burns in the *Annual Register*, as soon as may be after the Edinburgh edition.

Scottish poetry had been regularly within the knowledge of Southern readers for two or three generations before Burns—we may say perhaps ever since *Christ's Kirk on the Green* was published at Oxford by Edmund Gibson. A good example and proof of this is the list of subscribers to *Orpheus Caledonius*, London, 1733; there are many English names among them, more English than Scotch, I should say, guessing roughly—the Rt. Hon. William Pulteney, Esq., Thomas Pitt, Esq., Mrs. Pitt, George Venables Vernon, Esq. (6 sets), Lady Robert Walpole. I believe that Horace Walpole read his mother’s copy.

Burns wrote in the language of Kyle, because that was his natural language. But he had not to choose between that and English. Any page of Burns will show that his language is not to be described simply as a special dialect ; it has all manner of variations between the pure vernacular and the book-English. It is not, I think, commonly recognised how much an affair of art, an assumed and artificial style, was the Scottish poetry of the eighteenth century; how different in its condition from the poetry of the old ‘makaris,’ Dunbar and Douglas and the rest.

Beattie writes a poem to Ross of Lochlee, an occasional diversion, in the familiar stanza :

‘O Ross, thou wale o’ hearty cocks,
Sae crouse and canty wi’ thy jokes,
Thy hamely auld warld muse provokes
Me for a while
To ape our guid plain country folks
In verse and style.

O bonny are our green sward hows
Where through the birkis the burny rows,
And the bee bums, and the ox lows,
And saft winds rusle,
And shepherd-lads on sunny knows
Blaw the blythe fusle.’

He passes this off as a *tour de force*, a literary joke, and such indeed it was. And so are the Scots verses of Stevenson and of

Hugh Haliburton and the author of *Hamewith*, obviously. And so are the Scots verses of Robert Burns and of Allan Ramsay and of Robert Fergusson before him. Burns adopts a literary convention in the same way, though more consistently and thoroughly, than Beattie. None of his forms are invented ; all are taken from the tradition which had been founded in the seventeenth century by the *Elegy on Habbie Simson, piper of Kilbarchan*, developed and confirmed by Allan Ramsay. The readers of Burns, his rhyming friends and competitors, all understood this. It is all a game of language, 'crambo-clink,' with rules and patterns of its own, used for fun by men who wrote their serious business letters in English, and exacted the catechism in English from their children and servants, and sang in English the metrical version of the Psalms by Mr. Francis Rous of Truro, sometime Provost of Eton.

Now when this is understood it will be found, I think, to have some bearing upon the politics of Burns, though possibly I may seem to have wandered away from the proper field of the Historical Society over the borders into philology, if not into mere rhetoric and *belles lettres*.

It is a great thing for an artist to inherit a strong tradition, to belong to a school. It means that he has all the strength of his own and the last generation to draw upon ; he does not waste his time in solitary adventures ; he is not left to himself ; he is saved from caprice and melancholy, from the fate of Chatterton. Think of the difference between the art of Burns, his secure command of all his arguments and all his forms on the one hand, and the poetry of his contemporary Blake on the other—in so many ways miraculous, yet at what an expense of thought and care in finding out the new ways. The poems of Fergusson, as Dr. John Service expressed it, in a true conceit, are the *juvenilia* of Burns ; and Ferguson himself worked in a traditional way.

The security of Burns as a poet with the inherited forms and examples of Ramsay and Fergusson goes along with security and confidence in the choice of themes. His poetry, for all its rustic character and language, has the distinctive mark of aristocratic literature. It is self-possessed, at ease and sure of itself ; classical. It is not restless, or self-conscious or anxious or experimental or *arriviste*. It has the true dignity, like that of the man who knows he is master in his own house, and is accustomed to converse with his equals, and has no reason to go craving for what he has not got.

When Keats came up by Glen App, and so by Ballantrae and Girvan and Maybole to Alloway, thinking rightly about Burns, more than most men, he saw Arran over the sea, and wondered why the vision of the island had never passed into Burns's poetry. Arran had been before him all his days, and there is no word of it anywhere, in any of his prose or rhyme. For this disregard there was probably good reason. Burns has left out of his poetry many other things which must have been equally within his knowledge, and might have been wrought into the fabric of his verse. He was thought by some to be indifferent to the beauties of nature. He was certainly irresponsive when people gave utterance to their hearts of sensibility :—

'He disliked to be tutored in matters of taste, and could not endure that one should run shouting before him whenever any fine object appeared.' (Cunningham, Chambers II. 156 n.) Andrew Lang, in a sonnet written under the influence of Wordsworth, has uttered the same complaint of those who shout

'To me, to me the poet, O look there !'

But it is not only in matters of this sort that Burns is economical and reticent. The Kilmarnock volume, which expresses so much of the life of Ayrshire, leaves out a great deal. Burns keeps to the region he knows ; neighbouring provinces are left unnoticed, though he might easily have touched upon them, and brought back profitable things. Why does he go down to the sea, and no further ? Why does he make nothing of the contraband trade with which he came to be acquainted at Kirkoswald ? If he was too proud to speak of the Arran hills which did not belong to him, might he not have gone sailing with fishermen of Girvan or Ayr, Dunure or Turnberry ? No, they were not his own people ; his own people are the farmers or their cotters, and it was not his business to go looking for subjects. The fishermen are left out. So on the other side the further moorlands and their shepherds are left out. He takes the Doon where it comes near him ; he does not wander up to talk with the lonely shepherds on the Galloway border ; Loch Doon he never thinks about, nor the wild uplands where his river comes down from the granite of Loch Enoch, and houses are far between.

While he thus restricted himself in his choice of Ayrshire themes, he was attending to contemporary history. He must have read the newspapers and probably also the *Scots Magazine*

with extraordinary care. And he does not read under the influence of that Scottish prejudice which he was proud to confess in the well known and often quoted words : 'the spirit of Wallace poured a Scottish prejudice into my veins, which will boil along there till the floodgates of life shut in eternal rest.'

He is not particularly good at Scottish history. His Scottish politics are determined by Scotch drink. But the politics of the United Kingdom of Great Britain in his own lifetime were noted with a diligence which the biographers and commentators of Burns have passed over very lightly.

This historical study comes out in two poems particularly : the birthday poem to the King and the historical fragment on the American war and the parliamentary vicissitudes following—'When Guilford good our pilot stood.' His carefulness is proved through one of the conventions of that sort of lyrical satire. The rule is that persons are not to be named by their right names, if another name can be provided. It is that rule (together with the need for a rhyme to *winnock* and *bannock* and *Nanse Tinnock*) that puts *Boconnock* for *Pitt* or *Chatham*. Hence *Guilford* and not *Lord North*, *Montague* for *Lord Sandwich*, *Grenville* for the statesman commonly called *Lord Temple*. *The Duke of York* is *Right Reverend Osnabrug* (of course there are other obvious motives here). *Lord George Germaine* appears under his other name of *Sackville*. A note in the Centenary Edition, from an autograph manuscript seen by the editors, shows that Burns originally wrote *Germaine* :

'And bauld G——ne wham Minden's plain
To fame will ever blaw, man.'

Altered :

'And Sackville doure, wha stood the stoure
The German chief to thraw, man.'

I believe that Burns thought of changing it because *Germaine* was the right name, and therefore the wrong name for his purpose.

It does not look as if he were working with an index or a peerage at his side. He knows the names and titles of these persons of quality because he is interested in British history. Boconnock comes to his mind because he has found out some time before what he wants to know about the family of Pitt ; just as he does not need a file of newspapers, or a set of the

Scots Magazine, or the *Annual Register*, when he finds his old soldier among the Jolly Beggars :

' My prenticeship was past where my leader breathed his last,
 When the bloody die was cast on the heights of Abram.
 I served out my trade when the gallant game was played,
 And the Moro low was laid at the sound of the drum.

I lastly was with Curtis among the floating batteries.
 And there I left for witness an arm and a limb,
 Yet let my country need me, with Elliot to lead me,
 I'll clatter on my stumps at the sound of a drum.'

The fragment 'When Guilford good' looks at first like a rigmarole of mere annals turned into burlesque rhyme. But it works up to a climax, and it is not a fragment; it is the war-song of William Pitt, the young hero. It turns into that, whatever Burns may have first intended, or even if he intended nothing in particular when he began. And he certainly had the whole history in his mind when he began, and also his judgment on the characters. You may notice that his alteration of *Germaine* proves this. It is not merely a conventional vague illusion to Lord George Sackville's notorious cowardice at Minden. It is so, in the first version; but the second, the authorised version, shows that Burns knew what happened at Minden, and he has put this into a phrase so mischievous that the point of it may easily escape notice and Sackville be mistaken for a hero :

‘ wha stood the stoure
 The German chief to throw, man.’

It looks at first like heroic resistance; till you remember that the German chief, Ferdinand of Brunswick, was Lord George Sackville's commander, that the *stoure* means the repeated order to charge, with a prophetic allusion to the trial that followed. 'The German chief to throw' is not to confound the enemy, but to disappoint his own general.

Burns's politics at this time are clear enough. Chatham is his great hero because he knows about Minden and Quebec, and the taking of Havana, 'when the Moro low was laid.' And William Pitt the younger has his regard partly for his father's sake, and partly for his own courage and his resistance to the coalition of Fox and North, which Burns could not stand because it was meanness and knavery. He does not object to Fox because of his tinkler jaw or dicing box and sporting lady. Fox's gambling was

merely a good thing for a satirical poet, as in the address to the Prince of Wales in the *Dream*:

‘That e'er ye brak Diana's pales,
Or rattl'd dice wi' Charlie.’

But he seriously did not like ‘yon mixtie maxtie queer hotch potch, the Coalition,’ and he seriously regarded Pitt as a high-spirited young man breaking through the intrigues of party politics and likely to go further. And this is what he puts into his rhyme of the American war and Rockingham and Shelburne and the Coalition, and Fox’s India Bill, and Temple’s message from the King, ‘a secret word or twa, man,’ and Pitt’s courageous adventure —a long way from Mauchline, but touched off with the same intensity as Black Russell and Moodie and Peebles from the Waterfoot:

‘But word an’ blow, North, Fox, and Co.
Gowff’d Willie like a ba’, man,
Till Suthron raise an’ coost their claise
Behind him in a raw, man:
An’ Caledon threw by the drone,
An’ did her whittle draw, man;
An’ swoor fu’ rude, thro’ dirt an’ bluid,
To mak it guid in law, man.’

The Dream of the 4th of June, 1786, is the other example of Burns’s interest in the history of his country, which is not politically Scotland, but Great Britain. Also of the quickness and readiness with which he followed the news from London. *The Dream* is suggested by Thomas Warton’s periodical birthday ode published in the newspapers. It is worth mentioning that while the ode of 1786 prompted Burns’s poem, the ode of the previous year was the occasion of the notorious burlesque *Probationary Odes*, the sequel of the *Rolliad*. So that Burns here again had his eye on the same sort of things as attracted the wits of London. He has nothing much to learn from them in the art of satirical poetry. Here again, though here only by the way, Pitt comes in as the statesman to be respected; and Burns appears as the champion of the Navy against retrenchment in a passage which may possibly have been quoted, though I have never noticed it, in speeches of knights and squires who represent our burghs and shires:

‘I’m no mistrusting Willie Pitt,
When taxes he enlarges,
(An Will’s a true guid fallow’s get,
A name not envy spairges),

That he intends to pay your debt,
 An' lessen a' your charges;
 But, God sake! let nae saving fit
 Abridge your bonie barges
 An' boats this day.'

'Burns was a great Pittite down to a certain period,' and that period was the end of his free, unimpeded work as a poet. He is a poet for the rest of his life, but never again with that irresistible command of his art, that certainty in all his various themes and moods which went with the volume of poems chiefly in the Scottish dialect. After that he is distracted. His work in the songs, as we watch it in his correspondence with Johnson and Thomson is of a different sort, often painful and laborious. He wastes his time thinking about impossible plans for Scottish drama and Scottish opera. And his political opinions change. His important Whig friends make him unsure of himself; he has to ask Henry Erskine whether it will do to print 'When Guilford good our pilot stood.' He takes to wearing the buff and blue, and owes allegiance to Mr. Fox. At the same time he makes more than in early days of his Jacobite sentiment; he writes his worst verse in a poem on the name of Stuart:

'Though something like moisture conglobes in my eye.'

To make up for that—

'It was a' for our rightfu' king.'

But before he had forgotten his earlier studies and interests he wrote a deliberate argument which may be quoted here.

I cannot see anything wrong in Burns's letter to the *Star*, Nov. 8, 1788, protesting against some of the Whig rhetoric over the centenary of the glorious Revolution; it seems to me right in history and right in sentiment, with a shrewd stroke at the orators who blamed the tyranny of the Stuart kings and ignored the tyranny of parliaments.

TO THE EDITOR OF 'THE STAR.'
 (CURRIE, 1800.)

NOV. 8TH, 1788.

SIR,—Notwithstanding the opprobrious epithets with which some of our philosophers and gloomy sectarians have branded our nature—the principle of universal selfishness, the proneness to all evil, they have given us; still, the detestation in which inhumanity to the distressed, and insolence to the fallen, are held by all mankind, shows that they are not natives of the

human heart. Even the unhappy partner of our kind who is undone—the bitter consequence of his follies or his crimes—who but sympathizes with the miseries of this ruined profligate brother? We forget the injuries, and feel for the man.

I went, last Wednesday, to my parish church, most cordially to join in grateful acknowledgment to the AUTHOR OF ALL GOOD, for the consequent blessings of the glorious Revolution. To that auspicious event we owe no less than our liberties, civil and religious; to it we are likewise indebted for the present Royal Family, the ruling features of whose administration have ever been mildness to the subject, and tenderness of his rights.

Bred and educated in revolution principles, the principles of reason and common sense, it could not be any silly political prejudice which made my heart revolt at the harsh abusive manner in which the reverend gentleman mentioned the house of Stuart, and which, I am afraid, was too much the language of the day. We may rejoice sufficiently in our deliverance from past evils, without cruelly raking up the ashes of those whose misfortune it was, perhaps as much as their crime, to be the authors of those evils, and we may bless God for all his goodness to us as a nation, without at the same time cursing a few ruined, powerless exiles, who only harboured ideas, and made attempts, that most of us would have done, had we been in their situation.

The ‘bloody and tyrannical House of Stuart,’ may be said with propriety and justice, when compared with the present royal family, and the sentiments of our days; but is there no allowance to be made for the manners of the times? Were the royal contemporaries of the Stuarts more attentive to their subjects’ rights? Might not the epithets of ‘bloody and tyrannical’ be, with at least equal justice, applied to the House of Tudor, of York, or any other of their predecessors?

The simple state of the case, Sir, seems to be this:—At that period, the science of government, the knowledge of the true relation between king and subject, was like other sciences and other knowledge, just in its infancy, emerging from dark ages of ignorance and barbarity.

The Stuarts only contended for prerogatives which they knew their predecessors enjoyed, and which they saw their contemporaries enjoying; but these prerogatives were inimical to the happiness of a nation and the rights of subjects.

In this contest between prince and people, the consequence of that light of science which had lately dawned over Europe, the monarch of France, for example, was victorious over the struggling liberties of his people; with us, luckily, the monarch failed, and his unwarrantable pretensions fell a sacrifice to our rights and happiness. Whether it was owing to the wisdom of leading individuals, or to the jostling of parties, I cannot pretend to determine; but, likewise happily for us, the kingly power was shifted into another branch of the family, who, as they owed the throne solely to the call of a free people, could claim nothing inconsistent with the covenanted terms which placed them there.

The Stuarts have been condemned and laughed at for the folly and impracticability of their attempts in 1715 and 1745. That they failed, I

bless God : but cannot join in the ridicule against them. Who does not know that the abilities or defects of leaders and commanders are often hidden until put to the touchstone of exigency ; and that there is a caprice of fortune, an omnipotence in particular accidents and conjectures of circumstances, which exalt us as heroes, or brand us as madmen, just as they are for or against us ?

Man, Mr. Publisher, is a strange, weak, inconsistent being : who would believe, Sir, that in this our Augustan age of liberality and refinement, while we seem so justly sensible and jealous of our rights and liberties, and animated with such indignation against the very memory of those who would have subverted them—that a certain people under our national protection should complain, not against our monarch and a few favorite advisers, but against our WHOLE LEGISLATIVE BODY, for similar oppression, and almost in the very same terms, as our forefathers did of the House of Stuart ! I will not, I cannot, enter into the merits of the cause ; but I dare say the American Congress, of 1776, will be allowed to have been as able and enlightened as the English Convention was in 1688 ; and that their posterity will celebrate the centenary of their deliverance from us, as duly and sincerely as we do ours from the oppressive measures of the wrong-headed House of Stuart.

To conclude, Sir, let every man who has a tear for the many miseries incident to humanity, feel for a family, illustrious as any in Europe, and unfortunate beyond historic precedent ; and let every Briton (and particularly every Scotsman), who ever looked with reverential pity on the dotage of a parent, cast a veil over the fatal mistakes of the kings of his forefathers.

R. B.

Burns's opinions about the French Revolution have nothing dishonourable in them, and nothing very difficult to understand. They are like Wordsworth's, but of course without Wordsworth's intimate knowledge of France, and with sympathies less intense. He hates the invaders of France, and there is deadly contempt in his rude rhyme :

‘ You’re welcome to Despots, Dumourier ! ’

But, like Wordsworth, he turns to think of his own country when his country is in danger. There is no discord or contradiction between ‘ A man’s a man for a ’ that,’ Jan. 1795 (‘ two or three good prose thoughts inverted into rhyme ’), and the song for the Dumfries Volunteers (*Dumfries Journal*, May 5th, 1795).

‘ Be Britain still to Britain true
Amang oursels united,
For never but by British hands
Maun British wrangs be righted !

* * *

The Politics of Burns

The wretch that would a tyrant own,
And the wretch, his true-born brother,
Who'd set the mob above the throne,
May they be damn'd together!
Who will not sing *God save the King!*
Shall hang as high's the steeple;
But while we sing *God save the King!*
We'll not forget the people!'

Whatever may be the value of his later thoughts in prose or rhyme, they have not the significance or the force of the miraculous volume of 1786, with the other poems written but not printed at that time. Burns as a poet is to be judged by the work of those years; the more this is studied the clearer is the relation between his command of the world of Mauchline and Ayr, and his political understanding of what is meant by Great Britain.

W. P. KER.