

D R. JOHN LONGMUIR.

FOR many a year the big, burly, somewhat aggressive-looking figure of the reverend gentleman whose name heads this paper was familiar to every denizen within the "four bows" of Bon-Accord, as his name was in literary and scientific circles throughout the country. By no means a great genius in any subject, he had more than a respectable knowledge of many subjects, and was to the end of his days a hard-working, earnest student.

Born in Kincardineshire in 1803, he was brought up in Aberdeen; his father being employed on the famous smacks that sailed between Aberdeen and London. Early associations with his father's calling and friends, no doubt planted the seed of that love of the sea, the ships, and the sailors, which was a marked characteristic in his life. Passing through the Grammar School to Marischal College, young Longmuir, like many another student with soul open to the whole range of human interests and sympathies as unfolded in the classic poets, amused himself with versifying passages from Virgil, Horace, and that wonderful collection of epigrammatic poetry which ranges over more than a thousand years, from Simonides of Ceos (490 B.C.) to the sixth century of the Christian era, known as the Greek Anthology. After leaving college he taught for four years in a subscription school at Stonehaven, after which

he was appointed English master at Anderson's Institution, Forres. At that time he contributed some verses to the *Aberdeen Magazine* published by Lewis Smith. He had been also one of the band whose poesy illumined the pages of the *Censor* in the years 1825-26. Having received license, he became, in 1837, evening lecturer at Trinity Chapel, and, in 1840, was ordained minister of Mariners' Church, or, as it was more commonly called, the "Sailors' Kirk". At the Disruption, in 1843, he, with his whole congregation, went over to the Free Church, and the tie between him and his beloved flock, remained intact till 1881, when an assistant and successor was appointed.

Botany, Geology, and the allied sciences had great attractions for him, and he gradually became a kind of specialist in these subjects. On the formation of the Free Church College at Aberdeen, in which he took a great interest, he gave a course of lectures on his favourite subjects to the students. These lectures he afterwards re-delivered, with much success, extra-murally, in connection with the University, and continued to hold a science lectureship at King's College till the educational reformers played havoc by abolishing a University for pure love of learning. About this time he received the honorary degree of LL.D. His topographical, antiquarian, and scientific taste produced two excellent guide books, one to Dunottar Castle, which has run through many editions, and another, even more excellent, to Speyside, which is quite a model, and is highly valued, treating as it does of the topography, history, botany, geology, antiquities, and traditions of that most interesting locality. Pratt's "Buchan" evidently gave the hint for the latter work, but its own merits put it at once in the front rank of this class of literature. Dictionary-making also seemed to have an attraction to him, and the drudgery of this kind of literary work was well understood by a recent critic who prophesies that in the grand future, when everybody will be educated at "the State's charge", lexicography will be done, as harbour-making and other extra laborious and depressing work is now done, by convict labour! Longmuir nevertheless did much, and, on the whole, fair work in this laborious line. His last engagement of this kind was as

joint editor of the new Jamieson's Scottish Dictionary, published by Gardner, of Paisley. The editors of this unique work, though weak in the modern science of philology, and though following Jamieson perhaps too slavishly, have made it a perfect treasure-house of Scottish literature and folk-lore. We have already in these papers expressed our high opinion of his excellent edition of Ross's "Helenore", which in all probability will remain the standard edition of that Scottish classic. Well known, however, and esteemed as most of his publications are, his first venture at authorship is now comparatively forgotten, and as it is mainly by virtue of it that he finds admission into our gallery, we proceed to a consideration of the anonymously published "The College, and Other Poems: Edinburgh, printed for Lewis Smith, Aberdeen, 1825".

"The College" is a sketch rather than a story, in two cantos, and displays no little amount of "go" and facility of rhyme—hitting off with pawky good humour some of the defects of the then academic system. That the Scottish University system is one to be proud of, we would be the last to deny; but that it had serious defects, and may have yet, we think few will deny. The importance given to classical studies to the exclusion of more useful subjects, and the perfunctory manner of teaching, are well hit off:—

Soon they began their Alpha—that is, Greek—

Learned each declension; every tense and mood, I say,
Of *tupto*; soon the lads were fit to speak

About Anacreon, Sappho, and the *Odyssey*—
Start not, indeed, they read not through each book,
But hence and thence a honied morsel took.

Perhaps you give your head a meaning shake,
And cry, "Can they in five months Homer read"?

I beg your pardon, I've made no mistake,

But I shall tell you how the lads proceed;
They sputter o'er a line of Greek, and then
The Latin on the other page explain.

Boys scarce a year beyond the leading strings,
Are sent to some great grammar-school, and clamber
Upon the hills of Rome; all ancient things
Are known to those who of their English grammar
Know little more than those who cannot speak;
And thus prepared, they next begin to Greek.

* * * * *

I have known boys (such boys grow up to men)
 Who could speak Latin and could write in Greek
 “Sine errore”—yet they could not pen
 A letter to a friend—’tis truth I speak.
 Take council, parents, while your sons are young,
 O, make them labour at the English tongue.

Another foible touched on is the supercilious disdain with which many who have smelt the atmosphere of a University—who have “gone in stirks and come out asses”—look down on mortals not so highly favoured, forgetting that the great self-educated, outside the University world—headed by Shakspeare—are, perhaps, more famous than all the sons of all the Universities put together.

The hero of the poem is one Tom, the usual type of a clever country boy, bright at school, a bit of a mechanical genius, a musician, and, of course, a dabbler in poetry, who, fired with ambition, sets off to Aberdeen and gains a bursary. We have a capital description of the bursary competition, and the career of the hero as a “bageant” and a “semi”, with sketches of the professors, the mode of teaching, the examinations, &c., all racily told with a relishable spice of satire, and the second canto ends with a promise of further details of Tom’s life—a promise never fulfilled. There is introduced incidentally a poem, supposed to be written by the hero, “on revisiting the place of his nativity”, which contains some good pictures:—

Then in the ev’ning rang’d, around the fire,
 Regarding not stern winter’s sullen roar,
 The wrinkl’d “granny” we would all desire
 To give us songs or fairy tales of yore.
 She told—for now her singing days were o’er—
 “Sir James the Rose” and “Children in the Wood”,
 And many a tale of ghosts in castles hoar,
 Or kelpies laughing in the rising flood,
 Or witches, whose command no earthly thing withstood.

But turning from these terror-waking tales,
 We would, though rudely, represent the scene
 Where Patie woos his Peggy in the dales,
 And bashful Roger gains his scornful Jean.
 Or we would round the old goodman convene,
 And with delight some pleasing story hear

Of “wondrous Jack” or “Robin’s troops in green”,
 Or Al’way Kirk on blazes rous’d our fear—
 The ev’ning thus we spent till time of rest drew near.

The mention of Alloway Kirk suggests the quotation of the following fine apostrophe to Burns :—

O, Burns, how little did thy country prize
 The brightest genius that she ever bred ;
 To kennel thee with hounds of the excise,
 And suffer thee to pine beneath the shade
 Of indigence ! but this she oft has done—
 She knows not water’s worth till it is gone.

Why lavish hundreds now upon a stone,
 To tell his merit to succeeding ages ?
 Such sums to him alive some good had done.
 He rais’d a monument upon his pages,
 That longer will withstand the shocks of time—
 But this is not the subject of my rhyme.

The inhabitants of a certain city are said to have made the existence of Jews impossible in their midst, being more astute in bargain-making than even that ancient race themselves. We will not name the locality, but merely quote the two following stanzas :—

Somewhere between the poles a city lies
 (Rome lay on seven) upon hillocks three ;
 Just where a range of mountains takes its rise,
 And where two streams are married to the sea.
 I won’t say for the men, but it surpasses
 “Auld Ayr” itself for most enchanting “lasses”.

All men its male inhabitants abhor,
 Where’er they set their feet beyond the sea ;
 They so much wish to make their little more—
 They make the best of bargains that can be.
 I’ve heard one whispering to his friend, “Beware !
 “That fellow comes from ——; do you take care”.

We would fain extract other morsels from the Doctor’s juvenile poem, which we consider the best piece of verse work he ever did, but the exigencies of space forbid. We cannot resist, however, giving a specimen of his doric verse, Tom’s version of Horace, Lib. II. Od. XVI.:—

Whan sailors seek the moon in vain,
 An' starns concealt by cluds o' rain,
 They trimle lest the angry main
 Sud tak' their lives ;
 An' wis' to be at hame again,
 Aside their wives.

Our troops, though brave as men can be,
 Whan they are sent ayont the sea,
 An' sleepin' on a cauldif lea
 In drookit plaids,
 Lang sair their Highland' hills to see,
 An' heather beds.

Although ye fill our Provost's chair,
 Or ev'n the gaudy purple wear,
 Think ye your days, withouten care,
 Wad smoothly run ?
 Na, nae though ye had a' that's rare
 Aneath the sun.

Blest is the man that's aye content
 To tak' whatever God has sent,
 Though cheese an' bread upon the bent,
 Aside his sheep ;
 Nae cares nor foul desires torment
 His cosy sleep.

Why spen' we life, a scrimpit span,
 Pursuin' aye some senseless plan ?
 Or why suppose a foreign stran'
 Can comfort gi'e ?
 Wha, exil'd frae his native lan',
 Frae self can flee ?

Whan trouble comes there's nae remeed,
 Though ithier suns sheen on your head ;
 Care boards the bark an' munts the steed
 In ilka place ;
 To care the win' wi' a' its speed
 Maun yield the race.

At present knack your thums an' sing,
 Nor speer what ills the morn may bring,
 Nor yet expect a single thing
 Completely blest ;
 Those in life's winter an' life's spring
 Death may arrest.

A hunner sheep bleat on yon hill,
 An' horse an' kye your pastures fill,
 And mony a bow is at the mill,
 An' i' the yard ;
 An' ye can gang, whane'er ye will,
 As braw's the laird.

Just twa'r three fields to me belang ;
 I sometimes weave a rustic sang ;
 It keeps a chiel frae thinkin' lang
 In winter nichts.
 In scornin' a' the vulgar thrang,
 My muse delights.

The “miscellaneous poems” in this half-forgotten volume are of the usual juvenile character, and it would be unjust to quote them as specimens of the author’s bardic skill. The best of them are a few imitations from the “Anthology” and from Ossian. The collections of poems which he published under the titles of “Bible Lays” and “Ocean Lays” (the latter a compilation, with some original pieces), contain the poetical products of his maturer years, and have had a very extensive circulation. What he called his “hereditary attachment to the sea” and all that belongs to it, may be said to have grown upon him as life advanced, and in a certain sense, the more finished of his poems will be found in connection with ships and sailors. In “Ocean Lays”, we may note the verses—“Different Aspects of the Bell Rock Lighthouse”, the vivid realism of the lines entitled “The Sailor’s Home”, and the tender humanity which underlies “Another Man”, all typical examples of the work of his latter years, which usually begins like a song, and ends like a sermon :—

How proudly bounds the noble bark,
 Spurning the billows’ dash !
 While thunder-clouds are gathering dark
 Amid the frequent flash !
 A keen outlook the watchmen keep—
 What mark they darkling on the deep ?

The course is changed, and down they bear,
 - For pity guides the brave,
 And find contending with despair,
 A sailor on the wave :
 They lower the boat, and from the storm,
 They boldly bear his fainting form !

The means of life they fondly ply ;
His cheek resumes its glow ;
He points his hand, he strains his eye,
But words refuse to flow ;
One effort more, and thus they ran—
“Another—there’s ANOTHER man !”

The startled crew explore the place,
While, dirge-like, wails the blast,
But find they neither man nor trace
Where the last struggle past ;
Yet well will Ocean guard his bed,
Till summoned to restore the dead.

Has JESUS placed me in the cleft,
Beyond the vengeful swell ?
And can I see a brother left,
Exposed to death and hell,
Nor instantly do what I can,
While sin holds yet *another man* ?

As is well known, he was for long a zealous temperance advocate, and he frequently preached teetotalism in verse ; for many years he wrote a hymn for the annual New-Year’s Temperance Festival in Aberdeen, but these, like most teetotal poetry (which is not necessarily the same as poetry written by a teetotaler), are of rather a watery complexion.

In private life the doctor was genial, kindly, and communicative ; had an ardent love for music ; sang well, and played skilfully on several instruments, including the flute, the violin, and the bagpipes. Were it not outside the scope of these papers, much could be said of his numerous other publications, his platform teaching, and pulpit ministrations. Suffice it to say that he lived a busy and useful life, and when he went hence on 7th May, 1883, it was evident that few men have had more numerous or sincere mourners in the city of his life-work than John Longmuir.