

his competitors seldom fails to obtain. In proof of this assertion we remain the in-
dulgent reader only of such names as Campbell, Rogers, Bloomfield, Keats, Fogg,
Leigh Hunt, and a hundred others, whose works are really not known for, although
their names indeed sound familiar enough to the ears of the foreigner, they are
neither read in translations nor in the original, though their productions have more
real value than those of many who do not at all deserve attention. — We mean among
the German poets — and yet a good reason for our neglecting them, they stand too
much back behind such giants as Schiller, Goethe, and Heine, to be noticed by us.

AN ESSAY
on
the life and writings
of

Henry Kirke White

in connexion with
the contemporary poets of Great Britain.

The number of English Poets — from the period of Chaucer to the present times —
who have raised the literature of Great Britain to its acknowledged celebrity, is so
great, and the merits of the different authors in prose and poetry so various and di-
stinct, that it is hardly to be wondered at, if — studious as are the habits of the Ger-
man scholars and linguists, and much as the English literature is justly esteemed among
them — there still remain a great multitude of able authors, who are unknown,
perhaps unnamed or at least unvalued beyond the limits of their native soil, — how
much so ever they may have contributed in effecting a result, on which the Eng-
lish nation so justly prides itself, as enabling it to claim the palm of literary excellence
among the nations of Europe. How many able writers, who are appreciated by
their countrymen, are, as it were, thrust aside, into the background, and their
beauties lost to those foreigners, who do not make language their profession, save
when perchance some amateur lights upon a stray volume of some minor bard, and
adds its to his store on the shelves, if not to remain forgotten and disregarded, yet at
least to be but seldom enjoyed.

It would appear, as if the great luminaries of the English literature are so
prominent and all-engrossing to the foreign student, that the less considerable lights,
or those whose „humble lot forbade“ them to take a leading part among their brethren
of the Muse, must resign the estimation of which they are in many respects so
worthy, and be content with that degree of attention, which a literary genius among

his compatriots seldom fails to obtain. In proof of this assertion we remind the indulgent reader only of such names as Campbell, Rogers, Bloomfield, Keats, Hogg, Leigh Hunt, and a hundred others, whose works are really not known, for, although their names indeed sound familiar enough to the ears of the lover of poetry, they are neither read in translations, nor in the original, though their productions have more real value than those of many, who do not at all deserve mention — we mean among the German poetasters — and yet enjoy their share of fame. But this alone would furnish us with a good reason for enquiring further concerning them; they stand too much back behind such giants as Shakspeare, Byron, Th. Moore and a few more, who offer sufficient interest for a particular study, while they are known only by a few select pieces in collections and anthologies.

Our intention in writing these lines is, to set before the reader the name of an English poet, who asserts in more than one respect a fair title for being remembered and esteemed, and whose moving biography is not without its moral. We beg therefore to be excused, if we make Henry Kirke White the subject of the present essay, as it may serve to show, that he is unjustly deprived of the honour of being more generally known, and farther prove by his biography, that, while a serious and earnest will subdues and removes difficulties seemingly unsurmountable, an over-ambitious mind may also bring about its own destruction, and counteract the result so gifted and pure a spirit might have conferred on mankind. And we feel the more encouraged in selecting this theme, when we recollect, that in the terrible onslaught, which Byron made on the poets of his time, he not only paused with reverence before the departed genius of White, but poured forth his tribute of applause and sorrow. See English Bards and Scotch reviewers:

„Unhappy White! while life was in its spring,
„And thy young Muse just waved her joyous wing,
„The spoiler swept that soaring lyre away,
„Which else had sounded an immortal lay.
„Oh! what a noble heart was here undone,
„When Science' self destroyed her favourite son.

Kirke White is not distinguished for abundance of valuable poetry, depth of thought or striking novelties of ideas; he neither excels in energy and originality — and he can by no means be classed among the leaders of the fancyful art; — but it is on account of the promise, which he held forth in the few productions he has left behind, of what he might have become, if his life had been prolonged, and his ripened years answered the expectations he excited among those who were able to judge him after his desert, who pronounced his genius of the highest order and had reason to hope, he would one day become one of the greatest ornaments of British literature. It is to be regretted that such a youth was doomed to leave his sphere of activity at an age, before his genius could fully be developed.

The life of Henry Kirke White offers few incidents striking to those, who delight in romantic adventures or unusual changes of fortune. His biography is a sad tale and soon told. He was born on the 21st of March 1785 at Nottingham, in which town his father, John White, followed the trade of a butcher, and appears to have lived in rather needy circumstances. His mother, Mary Neville, descended from a respectable family in Staffordshire, had enjoyed a better education, than commonly falls to the lot of people of her married condition, and probably to her superior taste our poet is indebted for his love of poetry and the fine arts. At the age of three years, he was sent to a day-school, kept by a Mrs. Garrington, where he learned spelling and the other elements of knowledge. Here he must have passed happy hours, if we may judge from the verses in his poem, entitled „Childhood,“ in which he affectionately mentions the friends of his childhood and his schoolboy-joys, and among other delightful scenes, draws the portrait of his old school mistress, which may be considered a countrepart of the schoolmaster in Goldsmith's „Deserted Village,“

„In yonder cot, along whose mouldering walls
„In many a fold the mantling would-bine falls,
„The village matron kept her little school,
„Gentle of heart, yet knowing well to rule;
„Staid was the dame, and modest was her mien;
„Her garb was coarse yet whole, and nicely clean:
„Her neatly bordered cap, as lily fair
„Beneath her chin was pinn'd with decent care;
„And pendant ruffles of the whitest lawn
„Of ancient make, her elbows did adorn.
„Faint with old age and dim were grown her eyes,
„A pair of spectacles their want supplies;
„These does she guard secure in leathern case
„From thoughtless wights, in some unweeted place.
„Here first I enter'd, though with toil and pain
„The low vestibule of learning's fane etc. etc.

In 1791, when six years old, he left this „vestibule of learning's fane,“ and was sent to a reputable school in his native town, under the care of the Revernd John Blanchard, who taught him writing, cyphering and the rudiments of the French language. Here already he exhibited the innate passion for learning and reading, but at the same time the ambitious mind, that in riper years destroyed his life. His energy was such that, although his father employed him in his trade and he had to carry about the meat to the customers, he very soon surpassed all his fellow pupils, and his teacher predicted his future eminence.

From that period of his early life, a few anecdotes have been preserved. When about seven years old, he usually stole into the kitchen in order to teach the servant-maid reading, writing and what else he had acquired at school; — he also composed

a tale, with which he entertained this person, which, however, he carefully concealed from his mother. An other instance of his early displayed abilities was his composing, one day, a separate essay for each scholar of his form, consisting of about 15 boys, which essays were pronounced better than those usually made by them. He also assisted sometimes in instructing the younger pupils, and in this way may have excited the jealousy of the ushers, whose behaviour instigated him to some satirical sallies which occasioned his being removed to another master, Mr. Shipley, under whose surveillance he remained till at the age of fourteen. The circumstances of his father compelled him to discontinue his course of learning and to enter into a less expensive sphere of life. Kirke White's parents seem to have had different opinions on the farther education of their son. The father wanted him to continue his own business and become a butcher, but being altogether unable to follow this „ungentle craft,“ it was resolved to apprentice him to a hosier, in order to learn the art of stocking-weaving.

His mother, on the contrary, entertained higher views, and wanted to educate him in a superior manner. For this purpose she had previously established a Ladies' boarding- and day-school in Nottingham. Though, by her increased exertions, she gained more means for domestic comfort, yet they proved insufficient to carry her plan into effect — namely to support him at some college and to send him to the university. She was therefore obliged to yield, and saw her boy bound to the shuttle.

At this period begins a really miserable time for our young friend. Love of study, a cultivated mind, ardour and high feelings had always made him look forward to such a sphere of life, as was more suited to his taste, and in which he had the mental conviction, he would become a useful member. But now he saw all his hopes crushed, and he was doomed to sit for ever fettered to an employment, which proved altogether repugnant to his feelings and inclinations. He could not reconcile himself to the thought of giving up his beloved books and sit all day long tied to the loom and shuttle, while he yearned for the continuation of his favourite employment.

Yet in his leisure hours he found some relaxation in poetry and, while brooding over his lot, he composed his „Address to Contemplation,“ in which he gives us, with simple and powerful strokes, the picture of some landscape sceneries, which is scarcely to be surpassed. The following extract will serve as a specimen:

„Then, hermit, let us turn our feet
To the low abbey's still retreat,
„Embower'd in the distant glen,
„Far from the haunts of busy men,
„Where as we sit upon the tomb,
„The glow-worm's light may gild the gloom,
„And show to Fancy's saddest eye,
„Where some lost hero's ashes lie.

„And oh, as through the mouldering arch,
„With ivy filled and weeping larch,
„The night-gale whispers sadly clear
„Speaking drear things at Fancy's ear,
„We'll hold communion with the shade
„Of some deep-wailing, ruined maid —
„Or call the ghost of Spenser down
„To tell of woe or Fortune's frown;
„And bid us cast the eye of hope
„Beyond this bad world's narrow scope.

Having passed a year in this wretched situation, too hard for his delicate constitution, deprived of literary enjoyments and recreations, and entirely despondent, — he was, by the care of his mother, at last liberated and removed from his odious employment. By her unceasing exertions she had found means to get him entered with two respectable attorneys, Messrs. Coldham and Enfield in Nottingham, and, as it was impossible to raise the usual premium, he had to serve a few years before he could be articled.

Henry's state was now, comparatively, a happy one. He did his duty with love and diligence, but employed his leisure hours in learning the Latin, Greek, Portuguese, Spanish and Italian languages, as also in the acquisition of Music, Drawing, Chymistry, and Astronomy, and in the course of a year he made such progress, that he was able to read the Horace. 1801, being 16 years old, he contributed to some periodicals — such as the Monthly Mirror and Monthly Preceptor; the latter having proposed prize-themes for the youth of both sexes, he became a candidate and gained a silver medal for a translation from Horace, and in the following year, for the description of an imaginary tour from London to Edinburgh a pair of 12 inch-globes. About this time he was admitted as a member of the Nottingham Literary Society, and here he gave the first public display of the extraordinary endowments of his mind, by delivering an extempore lecture upon „Genius“, which lasted two hours, and, as Southey informs us, his audience was so much pleased, „that he received the unanimous thanks of the society, and they elected him their Professor of Literature.“

By his previous publications he had attracted the notice of Southey, and gained the patronage of several lovers of literature, as: Capel Lofft, Hill, etc., who took a delight in assisting a rising genius. By their advice he published, at the end of 1803, a volume of poems, and dedicated it to the Duchess of Devonshire. To this little work he modestly attached no merit whatever, but he hoped, the produce of the sale would furnish him the means of carrying into effect his design of studying, as he expressed it in the preface:

„Perhaps it may be asked of him (the author), what are his motives for
„this publication? He answers simply, these: The facilitation, through its

„means, of those studies, which from his earliest infancy have been the „the principal objects of his ambition, and the increase of the capacity to „pursue those inclinations, which may one day place him in an honorable „station in the scale of society.“

Yet there appeared in the „Monthly Review“ a criticism, which by its heartless and cruel attack, almost broke down his hopes and disheartened him in his design of continuing his studies or publishing any more. At this time, Southey wrote him an encouraging letter, and by his and the assistance of some other friends, he was enabled — as a growing deafness had made him incapable of practising at the bar — to relinquish the study of law, 1804, exchange it for that of divinity, and devote himself entirely to the acquisition necessary before his entrance into the University of Cambridge.

There was another reason that induced him to this alteration of his plan. His mind hitherto being chiefly directed to the cogitation of religious subjects, his speculations had not been able to settle his creed, and he felt rather inclined to Deism or a similar philosophical system, without however any taint of immorality. A friend had provided him with Scott's „Force of Truth,“ a book calculated to humble the pride of the human heart and intellect, and now the pangs of uncertainty and doubt began to prey upon him and at last induced him to seek refuge in the Bible, and by diligently studying the holy scriptures, he corrected and formed his religious belief to the standard of the English Church. But once having settled his mind, he was desirous of becoming fit to preach his belief, and resolved to devote his corporal and mental powers to its promulgation. The Revernd Mr. Charles Simeon and Mr. Wilberforce, of St. John's college, Cambridge, to whom he had been strongly recommended, procured him admission at Cambridge; he became a sizar of John's College 1805. By the monetary assistance of a few patrons and the generous benefit of the college, he was enabled to accomplish his studies, and Poetry was for a time entirely abandoned for classical attainments, and so intense was now his application, that with the assistance of his private tutor, Revernd Mr. Grainger, he within twelve months was able to appear at the college with real advantage.

Previous to his entering, the gentlemen who had received him in their employ, Messrs. Coldham and Enfield, attorneys, gave him permission to quit their service, without insisting on the fulfilment of his engagement, that of serving out his time.

Having been a short time at the university, a scholarship happened to become vacant, and he had the courage to come forward as a candidate for it; but in order to pass the examination, he dedicated his days and nights to prepare himself for it. His exertions were so excessive, that they had an ill effect on his body, and he at last was obliged to decline the competition; yet at the end of the term, in the general examination, he was pronounced the first man.

Though he might have been content with the honours he had earned, yet they could not satisfy the master passion, — ambition, which had taken hold of him and, now possessed him altogether. In the midst of weakness and debility — the consequence of his unheard-of exertions, he again employed all his faculties and studied by day and by night, in order to excel his former reputation. Meanwhile he distinguished himself twice, and was also named one of the best theme-writers, and within a fortnight he had enabled himself to compete in accomplishments with those, whose attainments had occupied their attention and labour during the whole term. In the great college-examination he obtained the object of his ambition, — again he was pronounced the first man — but the distinction was dearly purchased: by the loss of his health and eventually of his life also.

In the hope of recruiting his constitution and restoring his weakened nerves, he repaired to London, where he remained for a short time, but without any increase of vigour. Having accelerated his return to Cambridge, he did indeed relax a little in his exertions, but it proved too late; he had ruined his constitution beyond any hope of recovery. He underwent the consequences of his unceasing assiduity; his frame was totally shattered, he felt languid, for his mind too was worn out. Though anxious to conceal his hopeless state from his family, they received information of his rapid decline from some friend, and when his only brother Neville hastened to his sick-bed, he found him already delirious. No power of medicine, nor skill of science could have saved him, and on the 19th of October 1806 he breathed his last at the age of 21 years. He was interred in All Saints' Church, Cambridge, where a monument sculptured by Chantry, and a tablet to his memory were placed by a young American gentleman, Mr. Francis Boot of Boston, the latter recording his worth in the following verses:

„Warm with fond hope and learning's sacred flame
„To Granta's bowers the youthful poet came;
„Unconquer'd powers the immortal mind displayed,
„But worn with anxious thought, the frame decayed,
„Pale o'er his lamp and in his cell retired,
„The martyr-student faded and expired.
„Oh! genius, taste, and piety sincere,
„Too early lost midst studies too severe!
„Foremost to mourn was generous Southey seen,
„He told the tale and showed, what White had been;
„Nor told in vain. Far o'er the Atlantic wave
„A wanderer came and sought the poet's grave:
„On yon lone stone he saw his lonely name,
„And raised this fond memorial to his fame.

To the poet Robert Southey, who proved White's friend in all his difficulties, we are indebted for the few notes and accounts we have of our early departed bard, for he wrote a sketch of his life, and published his writings and poems under the

title „Remains of Kirke White,“ which for a time became very popular, and are still much read in England and particularly in America, by the lovers of poetry.

Kirke White, like the French poet André Chenier (born the 29th of October 1762, guillotined the 25th of June 1794), died before he had been able, to give full wing to his talent. To carry the comparison farther between these congenial spirits, both distinguished themselves by their zeal for study, and their effusions breathe the pure spirit of poetry, enthusiasm for what is great and beautiful, touching innocence and a sad melancholy, without any affected sensitiveness.

The reason, why Kirke White's writings are not so generally known as they deserve, is less on account of the crudeness of his productions, — for though not elaborate, his style strikes us as genuine and beautiful, beyond what we should expect in one so young, or because they are only the juvenile effusions of a mind, not yet properly cultivated, for they surpass many other productions more in vogue — than for the peculiar spirit of melancholy, that breathes throughout each verse, and most particularly for the rather antiquated form he expressed his feelings in. This arises from a tendency, which had been introduced by Coleridge and Southey, but particularly by the latter, to return to the literary standard of the Elizabethan era of English literature, instead of following in the wake of Dryden and Pope.

The point of view, from which Kirke White should be estimated as a poet, ought to be taken from the time, when Cowper and Hayley ruled the poetical horizon of England.

The latter was no better than a genteel poetaster, and had reduced Poetry to an art of versification, his productions having no other merit than an exceeding smoothness; yet in their day they enjoyed an immense popularity. He was, besides, really famous for writing good epitaphs and for his extensive circle of literary acquaintanceship.

The other, William Cowper (born the 15th of November 1731, died the 25th of April 1800), had opened the path, which modern poets were afterwards to tread with such honour to themselves and such pleasure to their followers.

We must first turn our attention to William Hayley (1745—1820). Since the time of Pope, the structural difficulty of English versification was completely overcome, and from that time it may be observed in the works of Dr. Johnson, Goldsmith and in the translations of Virgil, Tasso and Ariosto by Warton, and Pitt and Hoole, that nothing was more easy, than to rhyme with a certain facility, and give a measured harmony to the verses. At this time, Hayley cultivated verse as a mere matter of fashion and taste, and poetry was, so to speak, brought home to the minds of the least imaginative men. — On the other hand, Cowper — seeking for the resources of inspiration in the pleasures of countrylife and in the profound and varied sources of meditation, which these offer to the genuine poet, in the delights of gardening, in the enjoyments of the social circle, the peaceful intercourse of friendship, and above all,

in a deep and intimate, but somewhat melancholy feeling on religious subjects, a scholar by taste and acquirement and a man of great natural wit, — drew back the public attention to the eternal sources of poetical truth in the hearts, lives and occupations of mankind. Were we to judge by the number of editions of his works, no poet has been so much read in England, especially in families and by young people. As his style, especially in blank verse, is grave and dignified and his measures full and harmonious, he was called the second Milton — a title, to which however he could be hardly said, to have a just right. In his translations of the Iliad and Odyssey, he boldly pursues a course of writing, which the practice of scholars for more than a hundred years and the criticism of Addison and Johnson seemed to have completely precluded. Thus he opened a totally new career for poetry, and it would not be too much, to say, that the philosophical character of Wordsworth's „Excursion,“ and the satire, touching circumstances of private life, which we find scattered throughout the works of Byron, with the various attempts at descriptive poetry, which have appeared from time to time during the last fifty years, date their origin from the publications of Cowper's „Task“ and from the pleasures and dreams of the Recluse of Olney. — There is also another point of view, in which Cowper appeared to be the forerunner of a new literature — we mean his religious aspect. No one, who has taken up of late years „the Course of time“ by Pollock, or indeed Professor Keeble's „Christian year,“ can fail to remark a great similarity in phrase and sentiment with Cowper.

Now Kirke White, who in his characteristic fervour applied all his energy to the dead languages, had attained, by his studying the ancient poets, the same facility of expression, which distinguished Hayley; his verses are always smooth, even and agreeable, but his thoughts, like those of Cowper, are serious and religious. Besides this, we find him continually expatiating in beautiful scenery or in the charms of the domestic hearth, and like Cowper, he banishes from his pages anything alluding to the passion of love. Like the poets of the age, in which he lived, he carried the love of innovation in thought and verse to a point, which was not familiar to the bard of Olney; but all this effort is plainly to be traced to the endeavour, which Cowper made to recall the public attention to the earlier and richer monuments of the English language, to build up again the verse of Milton, and recall the memory of Herbert. In short, in whatever way Kirke White be regarded, relatively to the other poets of Great Britain, it would be impossible not to see, that he is one of the numerous family, who follow the footsteps of the Saint of Olney.

It may be thought, that our present age, or more properly speaking, the modern taste for literary productions, chiefly inclining to the powerfully stirring descriptions of human passions and the perverse state of human society, and bringing into play quite different speculations than those peaceful reveries, which are now commonly called „stale and obsolete,“ divert our attention from those poets of an earlier date, who were delighted with the homelier scenes of life, and direct them to such, as in

a more finished style and pleasing figurative language introduce their philosophical reasonings to the unsophisticated reader and draw him by main force into the sphere of their mightier minds. But the contemplative genius requires to be awakened by objects near home, and if the artificial phraseology and limited classical tone of the poets of queen Anne's age had not been thrown aside by Cowper, and so left him free scope for the natural poetry of his heart, and if Wordsworth had not carried this reform still further, it may very much be questioned, if many of the finest passages in the „Childe Harold“ would have ever been read or written. Many causes, no doubt, conspired to bring about such astonishing results, among others the passionate eloquence of Rousseau and the magnificent and imposing tranquillity of Goethe's genius; but if the question of poetical phraseology is to be enquired into, it is in Cowper, Wordsworth, and in Beattie's „Bard,“ that we must trace its source, and in them also we shall find no small part of the thoughts themselves, though in truth less profound and less exciting.

The decease of a young poet, whose mind has not yet been sufficiently matured for great conceptions, but whose productions give just reason to anticipate future excellence, is always to be lamented as a heavy loss to literature. Kirke White, by his juvenile works — however inferior they may be to those of similar early geniusses as Cowley, Chatterton, Byron, — undoubtedly gave sufficient indications of a superior mind, if we take into consideration, that all his poetical effusions have been created before his nineteenth year, whereas his earliest pieces cannot be traced from before his thirteenth, which, as he himself observes, „were written to beguile a leisure hour, or to fill up the languid interval of studies of a severer nature.“ From the following specimen, the reader may form an opinion, whether the young poet's feelings were not beautifully and clearly expressed:

To an early Primrose.

Mild offspring of a dark and sullen sire!
Whose modest form so delicately fine,
Was nursed in whirling storms,
And cradled in the winds. —

Thee, when young Spring first questioned Winter's sway,
And dared the sturdy blusterer to the fight,
Thee on this bank he threw,
To mark his victory.

In this low vale, the promise of the year,
Serene thou openest to the nipping gale,
Unnoticed and alone,
Thy tender elegance.

So virtue blooms, brought forth amid the storms
Of chill adversity, — in some lone walk
Of life she rears her head,
Obscure und unobserved;

While every bleaching breeze, that on her blows,
Chastens her spotless purity of breast,
And hardens her to bear
Serene the ills of life.

With respect to his own individual powers, we ought particularly to take into consideration the circumstances, under which his youth was passed, and the early period, at which his days were closed. If, now and then, we occasionally remark a want of finish rather in the thought than in the expression — and if, on the other hand, we continually observe, that the stream of poetry gushes out clear from an elevated heart, full of noble affections and high hopes for humanity, and that the simplicity of expression attest at once the modesty and purity of the author's soul, — we cannot fail to form a very high idea of the original gifts of this young man, whose effusions testify a soaring spirit, lively imagination, a judgment astonishingly correct, in as much as it refers to incidents of his scant experience in a narrow sphere of life and society, and last, not least — an accomplished taste and a fluency of expression, seldom to be met with in men of considerably more copious reading and habit of composing. But, as might be expected, all that he has left us, seem rather the sketches and fragments of opinions and ideas, which were to be filled up in the course of a life, alas! too short — than anything like a finished work or consummated poem, if indeed we make exception of a few little ditties, sonnets, odes, poetical addresses, hymns, which he had scattered about in several periodicals and on different occasions. — Still, one of the highest praises he certainly deserves: *his works may be placed in the hands of youth with the most perfect assurance, that we are sowing the seeds of high thoughts and pure feelings, and that the study of them will develope in their mind a correct taste and love for the beautiful in art and nature.* In short, viewed from this point, all that Kirke White has left us, deserves the highest recommendation.

Really touching is his devotion to study, and the sacrifice of his life for the attainment of his high aim. He died a victim to his zeal for learned occupation, and to the youthful world he gives a fair example, what can be done and what difficulties may be surmounted with earnest application and unremittingly constant culture. Poverty and debility were no bars to his high ambition, which, if we durst throw a shadow of blame on his character, was the only failing, for which he had so much to suffer, and which deprived the English literature of one of its best ornaments. Along with the favour, with which the Muse had endowed him, she gave him also the pre-sentiment of his untimely death, and from the tender age of thirteen, he commenced

the song of the dying swan. To the grave it is, he sang his sweetest measures, and to the rosemary, which also in England is a funeral flower, he addresses the following verses:

Sweet scented flower! who art wont to bloom
On January's frost severe,
And o'er the wintry desert drear,
To waft thy waste perfume!
Come, thou shalt form my nosegay now,
And I will bind thee round my brow,
And as I twine the mournful wreath,
I'll weave a melancholy song;
And sweet the strain shall be and long,
The melody of death.
Come funeral flower! who lovest to dwell
With the pale corse in lonely tomb,
And throw across the desert gloom
A sweet decaying smell.
Come, press my lips, and lie with me
Beneath the lowly alder-tree,
And we will sleep a pleasant sleep,
And not a care shall dare intrude,
To break the marble solitude,
So peaceful and so deep.
And hark! the wind-god, as he flies,
Moans hollow in the forest trees,
And sailing on the gusty breeze,
Mysterious music dies.
Sweet flower! that requiem wild is mine,
It warns me to the lonely shrine,
The cold turf altar of the dead;
My grave shall be in yon lone spot,
Where as I lie, by all forgot,
A dying fragrance thou wilt o'er my ashes shed.

The student of English Poetry ought also to pause here, and observe the simple subject of his poem, a *cottage garden herb*, which, till the renewed taste we have indicated in our allusions to Cowper, an English poet would scarcely have dared to name, — the ease of the melody, learned perhaps from Chatterton — and many a turn and expression, reminding him of England's most accomplished and elegant versifier before the days of Moore: William Collins. Throughout all his pieces, whether descriptive, religious or tender, he breathes his melancholy thoughts, deeply imbued with the firm belief in God and Eternity, which supported him in his distresses and aspirations, while for him, the world had

but an ephemeral interest. Such thoughts, as the following, are frequently found in his verses and fragmentary essays:

from **Lines, written in the prospect of Death:**

„I only wake to watch the sickly taper,
„Which lights me to my tomb. — Yea, 'tis the hand
„Of death I feel press heavy on my vitals,
„Slow sapping the warm current of existence.
„My moments now are few — the sand of life,
„Ebbs fastly to its finish. — Yet a little,
„And the last fleeting particle will fall,
„Silent, unseen, unnoticed, unlamented.
„Come, then, sad Thought, and let us meditate,
„While meditate we may. — pp.

or in his

Address at the grave of a friend:

— The busy world pursues its boisterous way,
The noise of revelry still echoes round,
Yet I am sad, while all beside is gay;
Yet still I weep o'er thy deserted mound.
Oh! that, like thee, I might bid sorrow cease,
And 'neath the greensward sleep the sleep of peace.

To a Taper.

— 'Tis midnight — On the globe dead slumber sits,
And all is silence — in the hour of sleep:
Save when the hollow gust, that swells by fits,
In the dark wood roars fearfully and deep.
I wake alone to listen and to weep,
To watch my taper, thy pale beacon burn;
And, as still Memory does her vigils keep,
To think of days, that never can return:
By thy pale ray I raise my languid head,
My eye surveys the solitary gloom;
And the sad meaning tear unmixed with dread,
Tells thou dost light me to the silent tomb.
Like thee I wane, — like thine my life's last ray
Will fade in loneliness, unwept, away.

But we have no intention of giving here an anthology of verses of similar import; these few extracts may serve, to show his inclinations to sad revery. How much he delighted in expressing such mournful cogitations, the perusal of all his minor effusions will show. We mention only his „Lines on Consumption,“ „On Death“ —

„I'm pleased and yet I am sad.“ — Most strongly he depicted the like feelings in the „Ode on Disappointment“ and „Lines, written in Wilberford Churchyard.“ The former was composed, when his competition for a scholarship, at the University, proved to be a failure, and the latter, when, having retired for a few weeks, he hoped to reestablish his health by a change of air in Clifton wood, which abode became the theme of a descriptive sketch in verse, and contains a great many beautiful passages about country scenery, from among which the following may serve as a specimen:

„Now passed, whate'er the upland heights display,
Down the steep cliff I wind my devious way;
Oft rousing, as the rustling path I beat,
The timid hare from its accustomed seat.
And oh! how sweet this walk o'erhung with wood,
That winds the margin of the solemn flood!
What rural objects steal upon the sight!
What rising views prolong the calm delight!
The brooklet branching from the silver Trent,
The whispering birch by every zephyr bent,
The woody island and the naked mead,
The lowly hut half-hid in groves of reed,
The rural wicket, and the rural stile,
And frequent interspersed, the woodman's pile.
Above, below, where'er I turn my eyes,
Rocks, water, woods, in grand succession rise,
High up the cliff the varied groves ascend,
And mournful larches 'oer the waves impend.
Around, what sounds, what magic sounds, arise,
What glimmering scenes salute my ravish'd eyes?“

Through almost all his pieces, we can trace his governing passion, ambition, and keenly he felt the pangs of it, when in the „Fragment of an Ode to the Moon“ he complains:

„Those feverish dews that on my temples hang,
„This quivering lip, these eyes of dying flame;
„These the dread signs of many a secret pang,
„These are the meed for him who pants for fame!
„Pale Moon, from thoughts like these divert my soul;
„Lowly I kneel before thy shrine on high;
„My lamp expires; — beneath thy mild controul,
„These restless dreams are ever wont to fly.

or in the „Lines, written on a survey of the Heavens“:

„Say, can the voice of narrow Fame repay
The loss of health? or can the hope of glory

Lend a new throb unto the languid heart?
Cool even now, my feverish aching brow,
Relume the fires of the deep sunken eye,
Or paint new colours on this pallid cheek?

When still a boy, Kirke White translated psalms, and even tried to compose holy songs, as if willing, to exercise himself in joining his voice to that of the concert of angels. The „Star of Bethlehem“ has been most admired in England among these compositions, and as its originality of conception entitles it to this estimation, we give it at full length:

The Star of Bethlehem.

When, marshall'd on the nightly plain,
The glittering host bestud the sky,
One star alone, of all the train,
Can fix the sinner's wandering eye.

Hark! hark! to God the chorus breaks,
From every host, from every gem;
But one alone the Saviour speaks,
It is the star of Bethlehem.

Once on the raging seas I rode,
The storm was loud, — the night was dark, —
The ocean yawn'd and rudely blow'd
The wind, that toss'd my foundering bark.

Deep horror, then, my vitals froze,
Death-struck, I ceased the tide to stem;
When suddenly a star arose, —
It was the Star of Bethlehem.

It was my guide, my light, my all,
It bade my dark forebodings cease;
And through the storm and dangers' thrall,
It led me to the port of peace.

Now safely moor'd — my perils o'er,
I'll sing, first in night's diadem,
For ever, and for evermore,
The Star! — the Star of Bethlehem!

We find also a hymn, which was composed when, having been troubled with religious doubts, he at last succeeded in settling his faith on the foundation of the holy scriptures, and resolved to enter the church; though interesting, as speaking his convictions, we hold it too long for insertion.

The stanzas, in which our poet most excels, are those, in which he describes his childish sports and cares, his little tribulations as a schoolboy, and the affectionate

caresses of his mother. The poem „Childhood,“ one of his larger compositions, and composed, when only 13 years old, exhibits in graceful painting, the scenes, in which he passed his early youth, and fondly brings our own childhood home to us.

„Neath yonder elm, that stands upon the moor,
„When the clock spoke the hour of labour o'er,
„What clamorous throngs, what happy groups were seen,
„In various postures scattering o'er the green!
„Some shoot the marble, others join the chase
„Of self-made stag, or run the emulous race:
„While others, seated on the dappled grass
„With doleful tales the light-wing'd minutes pass.
„Well I remember how, with gesture starch'd,
„A band of soldiers, oft with pride we march'd;
„For banners to a tall ash we did bind
„Our handkerchiefs, flapping to the whistling wind:
„And for our warlike arms we sought the mead,
„And guns and spears we made of brittle reed;
„Then, in uncouth array, our feats to crown,
„We storm'd some ruin'd pig-sty for a town.

* * *

„— At evening too, how pleasing was our walk,
„Endeared by Friendship's unrestrained talk;
„When to the upland heights we bent our way,
„To view the last beam of departing day:
„How calm was all around; no playful breeze
„Sigh'd 'mid the wavy foliage of the trees,
„But all was still, save when, with drowsy song,
„The gray-fly wound his sullen horn along;
„And save when, heard in soft, yet merry glee,
„The distant church-bell's mellow harmony; etc. etc.

In „Clifton Grove“ he gives us some beautiful descriptions of rural life and scenery, and tells a sad tale of an unfortunate love between „Margaret and Bateman,“ which even Thomson would have been proud to own as his work.

There is only one instance of his effort at being humorous or facetious; it is, when he describes his study in Hudibrastic verse, in a letter to his brother:

„You bid me, Ned, describe the place,
„Where I, one of the rhyming race,
„Pursue my studies con Amore,
„And wanton with the Muse in glory. etc. etc.

Kirke White's chief pieces are: „Time,“ which reminds us strongly of Young's „Night-thoughts,“ and is replete with deeply felt cogitations of Life and Religion; he

never finished it, but it was his intention to complete it, after having passed his examination; his death put an end to it; — „Childhood“ is also a fragmentary poem, and his „Christiad,“ a devine poem, is only the beginning of a greater epos, written in the Spenserian stanza, and clearly imitative of „Milton's Paradise lost and regained.“ He did not finish even the first canto, when he felt, that the hand of death lay heavy upon him; so he terminated his design with the following stanza, which may be considered the last verse, closing his earthly career:

„Thus far have I pursued my solemn theme

With self-rewarding toil, thus far have sung

Of godlike deeds, far loftier than bescem

The lyre, which I in early days have strung:

And now my spirit's faint, and I have hung

The shell, that solaced me in saddest hour,

On the dark cypress! and the strings, which rung

With Jesus' praise, their harpings now are o'er,

Or, when the breeze comes by, moan, and are heard no more.

And must the harp of Judah sleep again?

Shall I no more reanimate the lay?

Oh! thou, who visitest the sons of men,

Thou who doest listen, when the humble prey,

One little space prolong my mournful day!

One little lapse suspend thy last decree!

I am a youthful traveller in the way,

And this slight boon would consecrate to thee,

Ere I with Death shake hands, and smile that I am free.

This poem (the Christiad) is principally remarkable for the attempt to write at length in the Spenserian stanza of 9 lines, which had been used as an instrument of reflective poetry by Dr. Beattie, and which was afterwards so successfully applied in „Childe Harold's Pilgrimage.“ — Its difficulties are twofold, and both arise from its complexity and length; it may become heavy or languid, more easily than any other kind of metre, and it may lead to false grammatical structures and an irregular apposition of words, in order to secure the rhyme and versification. Both faults are at times observable, even when it is under the controul of the clear intellect and passionately versatile soul of Byron. White, however, without ever reaching any great height, uses the measure with success, a proof, how well he understood the resources of the English language. As a work of epical art, it is impossible to judge by so small a fragment.

„Time.“ We have already said, that Kirke White exhibits no very original or powerful poetry, and though we venture to maintain this opinion in presence of this poem, which has much that is wordy and insignificant, we cannot but feel, that Byron justly commended him as an extraordinary young poet, when we read his description of Time before the creation of the world, and mark, with what energy and sincerity of conviction he teaches the small value of wordly things and of human wisdom. This wonderful earnestness and sincerity is the true seed of all originality and power, and it would be hard to read the following lines, without feeling that Kirke White had in him the elements of a very great man: —

— — — — — „Oh! I would walk
„A weary journey, to the farthest verge
„Of the big world, to kiss that good man's hand,
„Who, in the blaze of wisdom and of art,
„Preserves a lowly mind; and to his God,
„Feeling the sense of his own littleness,
„Is as a child in meek simplicity!
„What is the pomp of learning? the parade
„Of letters and of tongues? even as the mists
„Of the gray morn before the rising sun,
„That pass away and perish. —

No doubt it was this sincerity, that struck Byron in our poet's works, and it is the gift, which enlivens and ennobles the whole of the Childe Harold. In this poem, as in the greater one, just named, we never doubt for a moment, that the writer is pouring out his inmost conviction, and if we recollect Goethe's axiom, that „It is earnestness alone, which makes life eternity (see Funeral of Mignon), — „Schreitet in's Leben zurück! Nehmet den heiligen Ernst mit hinaus, denn der Ernst, der heilige, macht allein das Leben zur Ewigkeit.“ (Ereq. Mign. a. Göthe's W. Meister's Lehrjahre.) — we must acknowledge on reading it, that we are standing in the presence of a very extraordinary youth. It is the outpouring, in passionate verse, of the sentiment, which Newton so splendidly recorded in his declining years to the effect, that after all his magnificent discoveries, he felt himself merely as a child, who had been gathering pretty shells on the shores of the ocean of Eternity. So true, so ardent is this feeling, that the poem takes its place, among our recollections, by the side of those more extraordinary facts, which recall us to a sudden sense that „life is but a dream.“

It remains only to speak of his prose essays, which are known by the denomination „Melancholy Hours.“ These, like his verse, show great reading and a happy adaptation of acquired resources, without however placing him in the light of a borrower or imitator. His sentences are short and animated, pregnant with good sense and natural but chastened feeling. The poetical element is here also visible, the true is always seen and approached as beautiful, while the intense seriousness of his character is maintained by its being estimated in its real character as good. — In short, if Kirke White is less passionate than Chatterton, he is more real, and if we set him beside the youthful Cowley, we must acknowledge him to be less witty, but, at the same time, concede to him the palm of good sense and clear poetical discernment. Consequently his Remains are more valued by the middle classes in England, who from the advantages and trials of their station are most called upon to practise these characteristics.

Should this brief notice and the specimens of our author, which we have ventured upon giving, attract the attention of any young student of the English language, we should feel ourselves amply rewarded for the labour we have undertaken. So sure we are that he would be benefited both in his understanding and affections.

This being the great object of all instruction, our effort, to draw attention to Henry Kirke White, has been a labour of delight.

Barmen, July 1847.

Dr. A. Sommermeyer.

