

Constable's Miscellany, Vol. LV. *The Life of James the First*. By Robert Chambers, Author of the *History of the Rebellions in Scotland*. 2 Vols.—Edinburgh, Constable and Co.; and Hurst, Chance, and Co. London.

Mr. Chambers tells his story in a plain straightforward somewhat tradesman-like way, without the least spark of genius irradiating his work, which however appears a fairly compiled narrative of facts that were all tolerably well known before. Sometimes indeed, but rarely, when he ventures to trust to his own judgment, he puts forth very extraordinary opinions; witness his comments on James's first literary effort:

"In 1584, when eighteen years of age, the king made his first appearance as an author.—His work was a small thin quarto, entitled, 'Essays of a Prentice in the divine art of Poesie, with the Rewlis and Cautelis to be pursued and avoided.'

"It consisted partly of poetry and partly of prose. The chief poems are a series of Sonnets to the Gods, in all probability the result of the king's exercises in versification under Buchanan. The prose part of the work is a code of laws for the construction of verse according to the ideas of that age. There is something odd enough in this association, the laying down of rules being rather the proper business of an experienced master than of an apprentice. Yet, the whole work is respectable. The poetry, it is true, contains none of the hair-brained sentimental graces which we look for in modern verse, contains no striking descriptions of external nature, no treasures from the far recesses of thought, no forceful exhibitions of passion, no joyful or melancholy ponderings on the fate and character of man, such as we find in almost every thing now written under the name of poetry. 'There is no evidence,' says Mr. Gillies, introducing a new edition of king James's Essays, 'that he ever loved or hated, rejoiced or suffered like a poet.' But the truth is, king James wrote according to the taste of his own age, not of the present. Judging his compositions by those of his contemporaries—the only way in which they ought to be judged—they appear very good. The poems of Montgomery, Hume, and others, whose names are preserved as the poetic ornaments of his Scottish court, are as unsuitable to the taste of the present generation as those of their royal patron. When the years of the writer are considered, they are entitled to be called wonderful. To write at eighteen, with a proper understanding of the selection and collocation of words, whether there be ideas at the same time or not, is no small merit."

Now we cannot help holding, in despite of this verdict of Mr. Chambers, that it is a very small merit to be able to write nonsense verses in one's own tongue at eighteen. We think we could do the like in half a dozen languages at that age, though we had no royal road to literature, and small thanks we had for our 'no small merit.'

The public life of James is well known to every reader of history; we shall therefore confine ourselves to a brief notice of his principal literary performance, for there is no new light that we have discerned, thrown upon his character in the work now before us:

"The life of James, between 1596 and 1600 is marked by only one incident of note,

the publication of his book of instructions to his eldest son, called *The Basilicon Doron*.—He had scarcely been a father ere he set about the composition of this treatise. The uncertainty of his own life, which led him to fear that he should never have it in his power to communicate oral instruction to his son, was his chief reason for writing the work so many years before it could be applied to its ostensible use; and in order that it might be sure to reach its proper destination, he caused seven copies of it to be printed, each of which he deposited in the hands of some trusted officer. These persons were enjoined strict secrecy as to the existence of such a treatise, for it contained some explanations of the author's mind on matters of church government, which he did not wish to be divulged till his plans were a little better matured. Unfortunately, however, a gentleman whom he had employed to transcribe it for the press, showed the original to Mr. Andrew Melville, who forthwith selected the passages unfavourable to the church, and, throwing them before the Synod in Fife, spread a prodigious alarm amongst the clergy throughout Scotland. James, seeing that these isolated passages gave an impression which the whole was not calculated to convey, then saw fit to consent to the publication of the work, which accordingly took place in 1599.

"The *Basilicon Doron* is by many degrees the most respectable of all James's prose compositions. It consists of three parts; one of which refers to religion, a second to the art of government, and a third to personal conduct. The whole is written in a style which, however unsuitable to the taste of the present age, was then thought excellent, and may still be deemed good. In regard to matter and sentiment, it is entitled to even higher praise.—James, according to unquestionable authority, was a good father. His bearing in that capacity was more manly and respectable than in any other. He accordingly displays, in his instructions to his son, a more solemn cast of thinking than in any other work; he blurs out fewer of those grotesque fancies which deform so many of the rest of his compositions; his whole mind seems to have been unconsciously elevated in the performance of this interesting duty. The book is a short one, because, according to its own explanation, it is difficult to get princes to read in youth, from the number of amusements which distract them, and equally difficult in mature age, from the perplexities of public business. As the whole book, however, is not more brief than the individual sentiments are concise, it contains a prodigious quantity of matter. The profound and varied learning of the author is proved by a thick margin of authorities, partly from scripture, and partly from the classic writers.

"Some passages of the *Basilicon Doron* are curious, as containing expositions of certain points in the king's character and history. We learn from one, that, in the earlier part of his reign, he was induced to pardon a great number of offenders, in the hope that his kindness would make them thenceforward good subjects, but that, in reality, he only brought the country into greater disorder by his clemency, and got no thanks from any one for his benevolent intentions. He tells us at another place, that he ever found the persons who had taken his mother's part against himself in his minority, become, afterwards, his own best friends; an insinuation that he believed it possible to make

the English Catholics good subjects. He also remarks, what is historically true, that all those who took a conspicuous part against his mother came to a wretched end.

"There is great humanity, and much correct feeling, in the following directions: 'And, although the crime of oppression be not in this rank of unpardonable crimes, yet the over-common use of it in this nation, as if it were a virtue, especially by the greatest rank of subjects in the land, requireth the king to be a sharp censurer thereof. Be diligent, therefore, to try, and awful to bear down the horns of proud oppressors: embrace the quarrel of the poor and distressed, as your own particular, thinking it your greatest honour to oppress the oppressors. care for the pleasure of none: neither spare ye any pains in your own person, to see their wrongs redressed. Remember the honourable style given to my grandfather of worthy memory (James V.) in being called the *poor man's king*. And as the most part of a king's office standeth in deciding that question of *meum and tuum* among his subjects, so remember, when ye sit in judgment, that the throne ye sit on is God's, as Moses saith, and sway neither to the right hand nor to the left; either loving the rich, or pitying the poor.—Justice should be blind and friendless: it is not on the judgment-seat ye should reward your friends, or seek to cross your enemies.'

"He makes a curious observation regarding the Borders. There are two reasons, he says, for giving no directions about their management. One is, that, if his son becomes sovereign of the whole island, 'according to God's right and his lineal descent,' then the Borders will be in the middle of his empire, and as easily ruled as any other part of it. If, on the other hand, he does not accede to that inheritance, then it is equally unnecessary to trouble him with directions, for he will, in that case, never get leave to brook Scotland either—no, not his own head, whereon the crown should stand. James feared, with great justice, that if the Catholics succeeded in their aim of getting the Spanish infanta to succeed Elizabeth, his present kingdom must also fall into the hands of that usurper: a notable reason for his leniency to the Catholic lords, in opposition to the wishes of his subjects.

"There is one passage in the *Basilicon Doron*, which excited no little remark at the time: it refers to the individuals whom the reader has seen arrayed in such violent opposition to the king in almost all the acts of his government—the leaders of the native clergy. On this subject, the royal author speaks with a degree of warmth and earnestness proportioned to the annoyance which he had received from those zealous defenders of the Presbyterian church-poly. There is also, in what he says, a candour and simplicity, an unhesitating expression of real feeling, which, though it can scarcely be expected to decrease the reverence borne by the Scottish people in general towards the fathers of their church, must yet have its effect upon the mind which simply endeavours to form a correct historical estimate of the motives of the two grand parties. 'In Scotland,' says the royal author, 'the reformation of religion being extraordinarily wrought by God, and many things being inordinately done by a popular tumult and rebellion, of such as were blindly doing the work of God, but clogged with their own passions and particular respects, as well appeared by the destruction of our policy, and

not proceeding from the prince's order, as it did in our neighbour country of England, as likewise in Denmark, and sundry parts of Germany; some fiery-spirited men in the ministry got such guiding of the people in that time of confusion, as, finding the taste of government sweet, they beguoth to fantasie to themselves a democratic form of government; and, having by the iniquity of the time, been over-well baited in the wrack, first of my grandmother, and next of mine own mother, and after usurping the liberty of the time in my long minority, settled themselves so fast in that imagined democracy, as they fled themselves with the hope to become *tribuni plebis*; and so in a popular government to bear the sway of all the rule. And for this cause there never rose faction in the time of my minority, nor trouble sen-syne, but they that were upon that factious part were ever careful to persuade and allure these unruly spirits among the ministry, to spouse that quarrel as their own: where-through I was oft calumniated in their popular sermons, not for any evil or vice in me, but because I was a king, which they thought the highest evil. And because they were ashamed to profess this quarrel, they were busy to look narrowly in all my actions; and I warrant you a mote in my eye, yea a false report, was matter enough for them to work upon; and yet, for all their cunning, whereby they pretended to distinguish the lawfulness of the office from the vice of the person, some of them would sometimes snapper out well grossly with the truth of their intentions, informing the people that all kings and princes were naturally enemies to the liberty of the church, and could never patiently bear the yoke of Christ: with such sound doctrine fed they their flocks. And because the learned, grave, and honest men of the ministry were ever ashamed and offended with their temerity and presumption; pressing, by all good means, by their authority and example, to reduce them to a greater moderation, there could be no way found out so meet in their conceit as parity in the church: whereby the ignorants were emboldened (as bairdes) to cry the learned, godly and modest, out of it: parity, the mother of confusion, and enemy to unity, which is the mother of order. For, if, by the example thereof, once established in the ecclesiastical government, the politick and civil estate should be drawn to the like, the great confusion that thereupon would arise may be easily discerned. Take heed, therefore, my son, to such Puritans, very pests in the church and commonwealth, whom no deserts can oblige, neither oaths or promises bind, breathing nothing but sedition and calumnies, aspiring without measure, railing without reason, and making their own imaginations, without any warrant of the word, the square of their consciences. I protest before the great God—and, since I am here as upon my testament, it is no place to lie in—that ye shall never find in any Hieland or Border thieves greater ingratitude, and more lies and vile perjuries, than with these fanatic spirits. And suffer not the principals of them to brooke your land, if ye like to sit at rest: *except ye would keep them for trying your patience, as Socrates did an evil wife.*

“He concludes this department of the subject, by recommending it to his son to establish, or continue the establishment of a moderate episcopacy, as the only form of church government which could consist with order among the clergy themselves, ‘or the peace of a common-

wealth and well-ruled monarchy.’ ‘Cherish no man,’ says he, ‘more than a good pastor; hate no man more than a proud puritan.’ ‘What is there,’ he exclaims at another place, ‘betwixt the pride of a glorious Nebuchadnezzar, and the preposterous humility of one of the proud puritans, claiming to their parity, and crying, ‘we are all but vile worms,’ and yet will judge and give law to their king, but will be judged nor controuled by none? Surely there is more pride under such a one's black bonnet, than under Alexander the Great his diadem, as was said of Diogenes in the like case.’

“Many amusing and many wise instructions occur in the third part of the work, which refers to personal conduct. He recommends frequent dining in public, and says, ‘in the form of your meat-eating, be neither uncivil like a gross cynic, nor affectedly mignarde like a dainty dame; but eat in a manly, round, and honest fashion.’ He tells the prince, ‘to take no heed of his dreams;’ to wear his clothes ‘in a careless, yet comely form;’ to use, in common speech, ‘no booke language, or pen and ink-horn terms;’ and never to stake more in gaming than he would choose to cast among pages. Among a multitude of other advices, he insists with a vehemence which goes far to prove the purity of his own life, upon the virtue of continence, and in a particular manner, implores his son, in the event of his marriage, to pay an inviolable regard to the nuptial vow. Every such transgression he esteems as a serious mischief to society, and also to the parties concerned, besides being what few ever remember that it is, an infraction of the divine law. And, as a mere proof of the inexpediency of such vices, he instances the illegitimate children of his grandfather James V. one of whom (the Earl of Moray,) ‘bred the wrack of the lawful daughter and heir’ of that monarch, while the child of another (the Earl of Bothwell) had been the pest of his own life for several years.”

Possibly it was this work that gave the first hint of the celebrated Eikon Basilike. We think that less than justice is usually done to the character of king James: men seek rather to be dazzled with great and shining qualities, in a king, than to dwell upon the more sacred and homefelt virtues of equity and benevolence, but he that looketh on the heart judgeth differently.

Irish Cottagers. By Martin Doyle, Author of Hints to Small Farmers.—Dublin, William Curry, Jun. and Co.

[SECOND NOTICE.]

In our former notice of this little work we pointed attention chiefly to its more amusing features; we shall now therefore confine our observations to its deserts on the score of utility. In this respect it is entitled to our hearty commendation; the spirit which pervades it, is good, the remarks fair and to the purpose, and we rather think the author is a clergyman. The advantages that may be made to result to the population of an entire district from the residence of a kind and judicious landlord, who deems it his duty to devote some time and attention to the improvement and advantage of his tenantry, are strongly depicted, and this is made the vehicle for conveying much practical instruction as to the best mode of managing small farms. Touching the importance of resident landlords who take an

active interest in the welfare of their tenantry, and the management of their estates, we extract the following portion of a conversation between the rector of the parish, and Mr. Bruce, a large proprietor, who after a long absence had taken up his permanent abode upon his estate:

“I wish,” said the rector, ‘that the really influential, and well educated part of our landed proprietors were more generally resident; in such case, the great blessing of domestic peace might be expected—the employment of our poor would be more steady and extended, and we all know that active occupation is ever accompanied by good order, and tranquillity; but as matters now unfortunately stand in many parts of Ireland, it is not a subject of surprize, that a neglected, unemployed, and half-starved peasantry, should be ready for every novelty, and every mischief; no people bear, and have borne more *real misery*—and, as far as my experience of them has gone, no people are more alive to *kindness* than they are, nor more practically grateful for it, unless (for the exception must certainly be made,) where religion, or the line of politics which they are artfully taught to look upon as religion, is interposed; they are faithfully attached to the persons, and the interests of their benefactors, and with total indifference to their own personal ease or comfort, would, in their own emphatic phraseology, go ‘a thousand miles bare-foot to serve them;’ but, Sir, it is of men of rank, and high character that we stand in need—men who will not take advantage of the necessities of the poor, and grind them, and extort from them, in the way in which the tribe of mushroom, and *half-gentlemen*, so often treat them in the absence of their legitimate protectors—if we had a fair proportion of landlords, possessing *your* means and influence, and using them in the same way, we should soon be a regenerated people.

“As to that, observed the landlord, ‘*tastes* are so different, that we can hardly expect a very great number of country gentlemen to turn their thoughts as mine happen to be directed—one person likes mine company and conviviality—another field sports—another show and equipage, and so on; and each claims (and has too) a right to spend his rents as he pleases’—‘unquestionably,’ said Mr. Gumbleton, ‘provided that he neither runs in debt, nor mischievously, nor immorally applies his money—but I must at the same time insist, that every owner of landed property has many duties to fulfil to his tenantry, and that if he has a proper sense of his duty in that state to which God has called him—of his moral responsibility—he will, especially in this period of agricultural embarrassment, avoid all unnecessary, and merely selfish expenses, in order to relieve the rural occupants about him; and thus eventually serve himself, his successors, and his country.’ ‘But happily,’ said Mr. Bruce, ‘a great deal is actually in progress; the gentry in many parts of this kingdom are very actively at work as improvers of the soil, and of the people; and I really believe, in spite of the vulgar prejudice in favour of good old times, that we (gentry,) are much better educated, and more usefully disposed, than our forefathers were. The squireens have nearly become extinct, and gentlemen of rank and property are beginning to estimate aright the advantage of improving their properties by *personal effort.*”