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Содержание

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MEMOIR OF BEATTIE, BY THE REV. ALEXANDER DYCE

"Heard you that Hermit's strain from Scotia borne,
'For virtue lost, and ruin'd man I mourn?'
Who may forget thee, Beattie? who supply
The tale half-told of Edwin's minstrelsy?"

The Pursuits of Literature.

The subject of this memoir was born on the 25th of October, 1735, at Laurencekirk, in the county of Kincardine, Scotland. His father, James Beattie, who kept a small shop in the village at the same time that he rented a little farm in the neighbourhood, was a man of considerable talents and acquirements:[1] his mother, too, was distinguished for her abilities. Our author, James, was

[1] "At his leisure hours he cultivated the muses. A journal kept by him, as well as some specimens of his poetry, are still in the possession of his descendants. This last circumstance is the more worthy of being noticed, as it proves that Dr. Beattie derived his poetical turn from his father." – Bower's *Life of Beattie*, 1804, p. 2.

the youngest of the six children of this respectable pair.

After his father's decease, which happened when he was only seven years old, his mother, by means of the emoluments derived from the shop and the farm, was enabled to bring up her family in comfort. In the management of her affairs she was assisted by her eldest son, David, a youth of eighteen, who generously and affectionately relinquished all other pursuits for that of promoting her welfare and happiness, and who appears to have fostered his brothers and sisters with an almost parental care. James was placed at the parish school of Laurencekirk, which was then in some repute, and of which, about forty years before, Ruddiman, the famous grammarian, had been the master. At this time he had access to few books, except those which the minister of the village (the Rev. Mr. Thomson) kindly lent him, and which he read with avidity. It was then that he first became acquainted with English versification in Ogilby's Virgil. Even then he was known among his schoolfellows by the name of *the poet*; and sometimes he would rise from bed, during the night, that he might commit to writing any poetical idea that his fancy had happened to suggest.

In 1749 he began his academical career, at the Marischal College, Aberdeen:[2] and as his circumstances were straitened,

[2] According to Bower, Beattie was supported at college by the generosity of his brother David, who accompanied him to Aberdeen, when he first quitted Laurencekirk to commence his course at the University. "The peculiar mode of their conveyance to Aberdeen is a matter of very trifling moment. It may not be unacceptable to some, however, to be informed, that they rode on one horse; and at a season of the year

he became a competitor – and with success – for one of those bursaries or exhibitions, which are annually bestowed on students who are unable to support the entire expenses of a university education. He attended the Greek class taught by Dr. Blackwell. This scholar, whose writings on classical subjects,[3] though now fallen into disrepute, once enjoyed considerable popularity, soon discovered that his pupil was no ordinary young man, and distinguished him by several encouraging marks of approbation. The kindness of the Professor made a deep impression on the mind of Beattie, and he used to declare, in after life, that Blackwell was the first person who gave him reason to believe that he was possessed of any genius. During the four years of his attendance at the Marischal College he also studied philosophy and divinity. The last mentioned branch of knowledge he pursued doubtless with a view to the ministry, the church being then the chief resource of the well educated sons of the poorer classes in Scotland: he, however, soon abandoned all thoughts of the clerical profession.

Having taken the degree of M. A., he was elected, on the 1st of August, 1753, schoolmaster of Fordoun, a small hamlet at the foot of the Grampian hills, about six miles distant from his birthplace: here also he officiated as præcentor, or parish-clerk.

Many an hour was now spent by Beattie in perfect solitude; the

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not the most agreeable for undertaking a journey (when good roads were unknown in Scotland) of thirty English miles." —*Life of Beattie*, 1804, p. 17.

[3] *Life of Homer*, *Court of Augustus*, &c.

family of Mr. Forbes, the minister, being almost the only society, save the surrounding peasantry, which his situation allowed him to enjoy. But his days went happily by. When not occupied by his public duties, he appears to have devoted a portion of his time to the study of the classics;[4] and occasionally he amused himself by composing little poems, a few of which were printed in the Scots Magazine. His fondness for music had ever been decided; and in his present retirement he cultivated it with uncommon success.[5] In the grand and beautiful scenery of the neighbourhood he found a never-failing source of pleasure. Not far from the place where he dwelt, a large and well wooded glen communicates with the mountains. In it he loved to wander; in it some of his earliest verses were written; and his recollections of its wild and romantic charms may be traced in several vivid descriptions of nature in his poetical works. Sometimes he would pass the whole night among the fields, gazing on the sky, and observing the various aspects it assumed till the return of day; and the exhilarating song of "the lyric lark" in the mornings of summer used to fill him with delight. In 1755, his loneliness was cheered by the arrival of his brother David, who came to settle himself at the village of Fordoun.

The celebrated and eccentric Francis Garden, Esq., (afterwards one of the judges of the supreme courts of civil and criminal law in Scotland, by the title of Lord Gardenstone,) who

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[4] Bower's *Life of Beattie*, 1804, p. 89.

[5] *Ibid.* p. 100.

was then sheriff of the county of Kincardine, and occasionally resided in the neighbourhood of Fordoun, was the earliest patron of our author. They accidentally became acquainted with each Other. Mr. Garden having one day discovered Beattie busily writing with a pencil in his favourite glen, and learning that he was engaged in the composition of a poem,[6] from that period took him under his protection.

At this time too he became known to another more celebrated and more eccentric character, Lord Monboddo, whose family estate is in the parish of Fordoun; and though their opinions on some important points by no means coincided, they ever after lived on friendly terms.

In 1757, the place of usher in the grammar-school of Aberdeen being vacant, Beattie, by the advice of Mr. Forbes, the minister of Fordoun, became a candidate for it, but without success. So conspicuously, however, had his abilities manifested themselves during his examination on that occasion, that the same place becoming again vacant about a year after, and two candidates having appeared, both of whom were declared unqualified for it, he was requested by the magistrates to fill it without further trial. He was accordingly elected to the office on the 20th June, 1758.

This was an important event in Beattie's life. From a secluded hamlet, where there was the greatest difficulty in obtaining

[6] Lord Gardenstone was himself a votary of the muses, though his verses are now forgotten. As a satirical poet he is far from contemptible.

either society or books, he was transplanted to a populous and flourishing town, where he might associate with those whose tastes were congenial with his own, and carry on his literary pursuits by means of public libraries. The friend of his earlier years, Professor Blackwell, had sunk into the grave; but he had soon the good fortune to become intimately acquainted with several persons of acknowledged talents and learning, connected with the Marischal and King's Colleges, as also with various well educated gentlemen, inhabitants of the town.

In 1760, a chair in the Marischal College becoming vacant, it was suggested to Beattie by his friend, Mr. Arbuthnot,[7] that he should endeavour to procure the appointment for himself. Our author, who had never dreamed of aspiring to so dignified a situation, heard the proposal with astonishment. Mr. Arbuthnot, however, "willing to try what could be done," induced the Earl of Erroll, with whom he was on intimate terms, to solicit, by means of Lord Milton, the powerful interest of the Duke of Argyll in behalf of the humble usher. The application proved successful; and on the 8th October, 1760, Beattie was installed Professor of Moral Philosophy and Logic in the Marischal College.

His first lectures were delivered during the winter session of 1760, and 1761; and for the long space of more than thirty years he continued to discharge most conscientiously the duties of the

[7] Robert Arbuthnot, Esq., Secretary to the Board of Trustees for Fisheries, Manufactures, and improvements in Scotland, who resided chiefly at Peterhead, where he carried on business as a merchant; a person of considerable taste and learning. He was nearly related to the famous Dr. Arbuthnot, the friend of Pope and Swift.

important station to which he had been so unexpectedly raised.

A literary and convivial club (to which the vulgar gave the nickname of the *Wise Club*) had been established for some years at Aberdeen, the members consisting of the Professors of the Marischal and King's Colleges, and of gentlemen of the town, who had a taste for literature and conversation. Into this society Beattie was now enrolled. They used to meet at a tavern, once a fortnight, at five o'clock in the afternoon, (for in those days the common dinner-hour was early) when, the president taking the chair, an essay was read, composed by one of the members in his turn, and a literary or philosophical subject discussed; at half past eight a slight meal was served up, and at ten they retired to their homes. To this club Dr. Reid, Dr. Campbell, Dr. Gerrard, and Dr. Gregory, belonged; and from it several admired works of philosophy and criticism may be said to have originated.

In 1761 Beattie made his first appearance in print, in his own character, by publishing a small volume, dedicated to the Earl of Erroll, entitled *Original Poems and Translations*. It consisted partly of some of the verses which he had formerly sent to the Scots Magazine, and partly of pieces which he had recently composed. "This collection," says his good-natured and not very tasteful biographer, Sir William Forbes, "was very favourably received, and stamped Dr. Beattie with the character of a poet of great and original genius." It was certainly "favourably received," the chief critical journals of the day being unanimous in its praise; but that it "stamped the author with the character of a poet

of great and original genius," I cannot allow. The truth is, it does not contain a single poem which rises much above mediocrity; and if Beattie had never touched the lyre with a more powerful hand, a memoir of his life would not have been required for the Aldine Poets. So lightly, indeed, did he himself afterwards think of the collection in question, that he used to destroy all the copies of it which he could procure, and would only suffer four pieces from it (and these much altered and improved) to stand in the same volume with *The Minstrel*.

During the summer of 1763, Beattie for the first time visited London, among the inhabitants of which, Millar, his publisher, was almost his only acquaintance. While residing there, he made a pilgrimage to Pope's villa at Twickenham.

The Judgment of Paris, printed in 4to, in 1765, was the least successful of our author's poetical works. Several passages of considerable beauty could not prevent this elaborate, cold, and metaphysical production from being utterly neglected by the public.

That his *Verses on the death of Churchill* (which appeared anonymously very soon after *The Judgment of Paris*) were read with more attention, is to be attributed rather to the subject of the piece than to its intrinsic merit.[8] No one can peruse it without regretting that the amiable Beattie should have been betrayed by

[8] Sir William Forbes says it "had a rapid sale." Mr. A. Chalmers, however (*Poets*, vol. xviii. p. 519), doubts if it was ever published for sale, except in Beattie's *Poems*, 1766, in the Advertisement to which we are told that it "appeared in a separate pamphlet in the beginning of the year 1765." I have been unable to meet with the original edition.

political feelings into such virulent abuse of a man of genius, who had just been gathered to the poets of other days. He is said to have written it at the solicitation of certain friends in Scotland, where the name of Churchill was held in detestation; and on these injudicious instigators let a portion of the odium rest.

In the autumn of 1765, Gray, who was then regarded as the first of living bards, paid a visit to the Earl of Strathmore, at Glammis castle. No sooner did Beattie hear of his arrival than he addressed to him the following letter:

Marischal College of Aberdeen, 30th August, 1765.

"If I thought it necessary to offer an apology for venturing to address you in this abrupt manner, I should be very much at a loss how to begin. I might plead my admiration of your genius, and my attachment to your character; but who is he that could not, with truth, urge the same excuse for intruding upon your retirement? I might plead my earnest desire to be personally acquainted with a man whom I have so long and so passionately admired in his writings; but thousands of greater consequence than I, are ambitious of the same honour. I, indeed, must either flatter myself that no apology is necessary, or otherwise I must despair of obtaining what has long been the object of my most ardent wishes; I must forever forfeit all hopes of seeing you, and conversing with you.

"It was yesterday I received the agreeable news of your being in Scotland, and of your intending to visit some parts of it. Will you permit us to hope, that we shall have an opportunity,

at Aberdeen, of thanking you in person, for the honour you have done to Britain, and to the poetic art, by your inestimable compositions, and of offering you all that we have that deserves your acceptance, namely, hearts full of esteem, respect, and affection? If you cannot come so far northward, let me at least be acquainted with the place of your residence, and permitted to wait on you. Forgive, sir, this request; forgive me if I urge it with earnestness, for indeed it concerns me nearly; and do me the justice to believe, that I am, with the most sincere attachment, and most respectful esteem, &c. &c. &c.

"P. S. Dr. Carlysle of Musselburgh, and Dr. Wight of Glasgow, acquainted me of your being in Scotland. It was from them I learned that my name was not wholly unknown to you."

In consequence of this letter, Beattie received an invitation to Glammis castle; and a friendship and correspondence commenced between the two poets, which terminated only with the death of Gray. The impression which their first meeting made on our author he thus describes in a letter to Sir William Forbes: – "I am sorry you did not see Mr. Gray on his return; you would have been much pleased with him. Setting aside his merit as a poet, which, however, in my opinion, is greater than any of his contemporaries can boast, in this or in any other nation, I found him possessed of the most exact taste, the soundest judgment, and the most extensive learning. He is happy in a singular facility of expression. His conversation abounds in original observations, delivered with no appearance

of sententious formality, and seeming to arise spontaneously without study or premeditation. I passed two very agreeable days with him in Glammis, and found him as easy in his manners, and as communicative and frank, as I could have wished."

A new edition of our author's Poems came forth in 1766. From it a large portion of the pieces published in the former collection was rejected; while *The Judgment of Paris*, the *Lines on the Death of Churchill*, and one or two copies of verses never before printed, supplied the deficiency. The translation of Addison's *Pygmæogeranomachia*, which concludes the volume, is remarkable for its spirited and graceful versification.

In a letter to Dr. Blacklock, dated 22d September in the same year, Beattie thus alludes to his great work, *The Minstrel*: —

"Not long ago I began a poem in the style and stanza of Spenser, in which I propose to give full scope to my inclination, and be either droll or pathetic, descriptive or sentimental, tender or satirical, as the humour strikes me; for, if I mistake not, the manner which I have adopted admits equally of all these kinds of composition. I have written one hundred and fifty lines, and am surprised to find the structure of that complicated stanza so little troublesome. I was always fond of it, for I think it the most harmonious that ever was contrived. It admits of more variety of pauses than either the couplet or the alternate rhyme; and it concludes with a pomp and majesty of sound, which, to my ear, is wonderfully delightful. It seems also very well adapted to the genius of our language, which, from its irregularity of

inflexion and number of monosyllables, abounds in diversified terminations, and consequently renders our poetry susceptible of an endless variety of legitimate rhymes. But I am so far from intending this performance for the press, that I am morally certain it never will be finished. I shall add a stanza now and then, when I am at leisure, and when I have no humour for any other amusement; but I am resolved to write no more poetry with a view to publication, till I see some dawnings of a poetical taste among the generality of readers, of which, however, there is not at present any thing like an appearance."

Writing to Sir William Forbes, 8th January, 1767, our author gives an account of the cause of his composing *The Hermit*, the most perfect of his minor poems: —

"The favourable reception you gave to my little poem, demands my acknowledgments. I aimed at simplicity in the expression, and something like uncommonness in the thought; and I own I am not ill pleased with it upon the whole; though I am sensible it does not answer the purpose for which I made it. I wrote it at the desire of a young lady of this country, who has a taste both for poetry and music, and wanted me to make words for a Scots tune called 'Pentland Hills,' of which she is very fond. The verses correspond well enough with the measure and subject of the tune, but are extremely unsuitable for the purpose of a song."[9]

[9] I have been told that the poem consisted originally of only four stanzas, and that the two beautiful ones with which it now concludes were added, a considerable time after

To Dr. Blacklock he again writes concerning *The Minstrel*:

"Aberdeen, 20th May, 1767.

"My performance in Spenser's stanza has not advanced a single line these many months. It is called 'The Minstrel.' The subject was suggested by a dissertation on the old minstrels, which is prefixed to a collection of Ballads lately published by Dodsley, in three volumes. I propose to give an account of the birth, education, and adventures of one of those bards; in which I shall have full scope for description, sentiment, satire, and even a certain species of humour and of pathos, which, in the opinion of my great master are by no means inconsistent, as is evident from his works. My hero is to be born in the south of Scotland; which you know was the native land of the English minstrels; I mean of those minstrels who travelled into England, and supported themselves there by singing their ballads to the harp. His father is a shepherd. The son will have a natural taste for music and the beauties of nature; which, however, languishes for want of culture, till in due time he meets with a hermit, who gives him some instruction; but endeavours to check his genius for poetry and adventures, by representing the happiness of obscurity and solitude, and the bad reception which poetry has met with in

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the others were written, at the request of Mrs. Carnegie, of Charlton, near Montrose. This lady, whose maiden name was Scott, was authoress of a poem called *Dunotter Castle*, printed in the second edition of Colman and Thornton's *Poems by Eminent Ladies*.'Pentland Hills', for which Beattie wrote *The Hermit*, was an air composed by Mr. Tytler, of Woodhouselee, in imitation of the old Scottish melodies.

almost every age. The poor swain acquiesces in this advice, and resolves to follow his father's employment; when, on a sudden, the country is invaded by the Danes, or English borderers, (I know not which,) and he is stript of all his little fortune, and obliged by necessity to commence minstrel. This is all that I have as yet concerted of the plan. I have written one hundred and fifty lines, but my hero is not yet born, though now in a fair way of being so, for his parents are described and married. I know not whether I shall ever proceed any farther: however, I am not dissatisfied with what I have written."

On the 28th June, 1767, Beattie was married at Aberdeen to Miss Mary Dun, only daughter of the rector of the Grammar-school in that city; a mutual attachment having for some time existed between them. She was a few years younger than our author: her person was pleasing, her manners were lively; and she possessed a moderate share of accomplishments. This union, which seemed to promise nothing but happiness to Beattie, threw the blight of misery over his later years, and undoubtedly contributed to shorten his career. The woman whom he had selected as a partner for life, inherited from her mother the most dreadful of human maladies, – insanity; which, a few years after marriage, displayed itself in strange follies and caprices,[10] and at last broke forth with such violence, as to render her separation

[10] On one occasion, I have been informed, she took some China jars from the chimney-piece, and carefully arranged them on the top of the parlour door, in order that when Beattie opened it, they might fall upon his head.

from her family absolutely necessary. By this lady he had two sons, of whom particular mention will be made hereafter.

Beattie now employed himself on the composition of his *Essay on Truth*, a work, which was to be honoured with such marks of public approbation, as the most sanguine author in his wildest dreams of success could hardly have anticipated. In a letter to Sir William Forbes, dated 17th January, 1768, he says: —

"I have, for a time, laid aside my favourite studies, that I might have leisure to prosecute a philosophical inquiry, less amusing indeed than poetry and criticism, but not less important. The extraordinary success of the sceptical philosophy has long filled me with regret. I wish I could undeceive mankind in regard to this matter. Perhaps this wish is vain: but it can do no harm to make the trial. The point I am now labouring to prove, is the universality and immutability of moral sentiment, – a point which has been brought into dispute, both by the friends and by the enemies of virtue. In an age less licentious in its principles, it would not, perhaps, be necessary to insist much on this point. At present it is very necessary. Philosophers have ascribed all religion to human policy. Nobody knows how soon they may ascribe all morality to the same origin; and then the foundations of human society, as well as of human happiness, will be effectually undermined. To accomplish this end, Hobbes, Hume, Mandeville, and even Locke, have laboured; and, I am sorry to say, from my knowledge of mankind, that their labour has not been altogether in vain. Not that the works of these

philosophers are generally read, or even understood by the few who read them. It is not the mode, now-a-days, for a man to think for himself; but they greedily adopt the conclusions, without any concern about the arguments or principles whence they proceed; and they justify their own credulity by general declamations upon the transcendent merit of their favourite authors, and the universal deference that is paid to their genius and learning. If I can prove those authors guilty of gross misrepresentations of matters of fact, unacquainted with the human heart, ignorant even of their own principles, the dupes of verbal ambiguities, and the votaries of frivolous, though dangerous philosophy, I shall do some little service to the cause of truth; and all this I will undertake to prove in many instances of high importance."

During this year, a poem in broad Scotch, entitled *The Fortunate Shepherdess*, by Alexander Ross, schoolmaster, of Lochlee, was printed by subscription at Aberdeen; and in order to excite some curiosity about the volume, Beattie good-naturedly wrote a copy of verses in the same dialect, addressed to the author, which appeared in the Aberdeen Journal.[11]

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[11] Beattie's Verses were printed in the Aberdeen Journal, together with an introductory letter in prose also by him, signed "Oliver Oldstile." The writer of the Life of Ross, in that pleasing compilation, *Lives of Scottish Poets*, 3 vols. 1822, says: "The author of both productions was generally understood to be Dr. Beattie; and they have remained so long ascribed to him without contradiction, that there can be little doubt of their being from his pen." *Part* iii. p. 107. There is no doubt about the matter; Beattie owns them in a letter to Blacklock. – Forbes's *Life of Beattie*, vol. i. p. 153. ed. 1807. *The Fortunate Shepherdess* is a poem of great merit: to the second edition of it (and I believe to all subsequent editions) Beattie's verses are prefixed.

He thus communicates to Dr. Blacklock his motives for attempting the laborious prose work, with which he was still occupied: —

"Aberdeen, 9th January, 1769.

"It was very kind in you to read over my 'Essay on the Immutability of Moral Sentiment' with so much attention. I wish it deserved any part of the high encomium you bestowed on it. I flatter myself it will receive considerable improvements from a second transcribing, which I intend to begin as soon as I can. Some parts of it will be enlarged, and others (perhaps) shortened: the examples from history, and authorities from ancient authors, will be more numerous; it will be regularly distributed into chapters and sections, and the language will be corrected throughout. The first part, which treats of the permanency of truth in general, is now in great forwardness; ninety pages in quarto are finished, and materials provided for as many more. The design of the whole you will guess from the part you have seen. It is to overthrow scepticism, and establish conviction in its place; a conviction not in the least favourable to bigotry or prejudice, far less to a persecuting spirit; but such a conviction as produces firmness of mind, and stability of principle, in a consistence with moderation, candour, and liberal inquiry. If I understand my own design, it is certainly this; whether I shall accomplish this design or not, the event only will determine. Meantime I go on with cheerfulness in this intricate and fatiguing study, because I would fain hope that it may do

some good; harm I think it cannot possibly do any.

"Perhaps you are anxious to know what first induced me to write on the subject; I will tell you as briefly as I can. In my younger days I read chiefly for the sake of amusement, and I found myself best amused with the classics, and what we call the *belles lettres*. Metaphysics I disliked; mathematics pleased me better; but I found my mind neither improved nor gratified by that study. When Providence allotted me my present station, it became incumbent on me to read what had been written on the subject of morals and human nature; the works of Locke, Berkeley, and Hume, were celebrated as masterpieces in this way; to them, therefore, I had recourse. But, as I begin to study them with great prejudices in their favour, you will readily conceive how strangely I was surprised to find them, as I thought, replete with absurdities. I pondered these absurdities: I weighed the arguments, with which I was sometimes not a little confounded; and the result was, that I began at last to suspect my own understanding, and to think that I had not capacity for such a study. For I could not conceive it possible, that the absurdities of these authors were so great as they seemed to me to be; otherwise, thought I, the world would never admire them so much. About this time some excellent antisceptical works made their appearance, particularly Reid's 'Inquiry into the Human Mind.' Then it was that I began to have a little more confidence in my own judgment, when I found it confirmed by those of whose abilities I did not entertain the least distrust. I reviewed my

authors again, with a very different temper of mind. A very little truth will sometimes enlighten a vast extent of science. I found that the sceptical philosophy was not what the world imagined it to be, nor what I, following the opinion of the world, had hitherto imagined it to be, but a frivolous, though dangerous, system of verbal subtilty, which it required neither genius, nor learning, nor taste, nor knowledge of mankind,[Pg xxviii] to be able to put together; but only a captious temper, an irreligious spirit, a moderate command of words, and an extraordinary degree of vanity and presumption. You will easily perceive that I am speaking of this philosophy only in its most extravagant state, that is, as it appears in the works of Mr. Hume. The more I study it, the more am I confirmed in this opinion. But while I applauded and admired the sagacity of those who led me into, or at least encouraged me to proceed in, this train of thinking, I was not altogether satisfied with them in another respect. I could not approve that extraordinary adulation which some of them paid to their arch-adversary. I could not conceive the propriety of paying compliments to a man's *heart*, at the very time one is proving that his aim is to subvert the principles of truth, virtue, and religion; nor to his *understanding*, when we are charging him with publishing the grossest and most contemptible nonsense. I thought I then foresaw, what I have since found to happen, that this controversy will be looked upon rather as a trial of skill between two logicians, than as a disquisition in which the best interests of mankind were concerned; and that the world,

especially the fashionable part of it, would still be disposed to pay the greatest deference to the opinions of him who, even by the acknowledgment of his antagonists, was confessed to be the best philosopher and the soundest reasoner. All this has happened, and more. Some, to my certain knowledge, have said, that Mr. Hume and his adversaries did really act in concert, in order mutually to promote the sale of one another's works; as a proof of which, they mention, not only the extravagant compliments that pass between them, but also the circumstance of Dr. R.[12] and Dr. C.[13] sending their manuscripts to be perused and corrected by Mr. Hume before they gave them to the press. I, who know both the men, am very sensible of the gross falsehood of these reports. As to the affair of the manuscripts, it was, I am convinced, candour and modesty that induced them to it. But the world knows no such thing; and, therefore, may be excused for mistaking the meaning of actions that have really an equivocal appearance. I know likewise that they are sincere, not only in the detestation they express for Mr. Hume's irreligious tenets, but also in the compliments they have paid to his talents; for they both look upon him as an extraordinary genius; a point in which I cannot agree with them. But while I thus vindicate them from imputations, which the world, from its ignorance of circumstances, has laid to their charge, I cannot approve them in every thing; I wish they had carried their researches a little

[12] Dr. Reid.

[13] Dr. Campbell.

farther, and expressed themselves with a little more firmness and spirit. For well I know, that their works, for want of this, will never produce that effect which (if all mankind were cool metaphysical reasoners) might be expected from them. There is another thing in which my judgment differs considerably from that of the gentlemen just mentioned. They have great metaphysical abilities, and they love the metaphysical sciences. I do not. I am convinced that this metaphysical spirit is the bane of true learning, true taste, and true science; that to it we owe all this modern scepticism and atheism; that it has a bad effect upon the human faculties, and tends not a little to sour the temper, to subvert good principles, and to disqualify men for the business of life. You will now see wherein my views differ from those of the other answerers of Mr. Hume. I want to show the world, that the sceptical philosophy is contradictory to itself, and destructive of genuine philosophy, as well as of religion and virtue; that it is in its own nature so paltry a thing (however it may have been celebrated by some,) that to be despised it needs only to be known; that no degree of genius is necessary to qualify a man for making a figure in this pretended science; but rather a certain minuteness and suspiciousness of mind, and want of sensibility, the very reverse of true intellectual excellence; that metaphysics cannot possibly do any good, but may do, and actually have done, much harm; that sceptical philosophers, whatever they may pretend, are the corrupters of science, the pests of society, and the enemies of mankind. I want to show, that the same method

of reasoning, which these people have adopted in their books, if transferred into common life, would show them to be destitute of common sense; that true philosophers follow a different method of reasoning: and that, without following a different method, no truth can be discovered. I want to lay before the public, in as strong a light as possible, the following dilemma: our sceptics either believe the doctrines they publish, or they do not believe them: if they believe them, they are fools – if not, they are a thousand times worse. I want also to fortify the mind against the sceptical poison, and to propose certain criteria of moral truth, by which some of the most dangerous sceptical errors may be detected and guarded against.

"You are sensible, that, in order to attain these ends, it is absolutely necessary for me to use great plainness of speech. My expressions must not be so tame as to seem to imply either a diffidence in my principles, or a coldness towards the cause I have undertaken to defend. And where is the man who can blame me for speaking from the heart, and therefore speaking with warmth, when I appear in the cause of truth, religion, virtue, and mankind? I am sure my dear friend Dr. Blacklock will not; he, who has set before me so many examples of this laudable ardour; he, whose style I should be proud to take for my model, if I were not aware of the difficulty, I may say, the insuperable difficulty, of imitating it with success. You need not fear, however, that I expose myself by an excess of passion or petulance. I hope I shall be animated, without losing my temper, and keen, without injury

to good manners. In a word, I will be as soft and delicate as the subject and my conscience will allow. One gentleman, a friend of yours,[14] I shall have occasion to treat with much freedom. I have heard of his virtues. I know he has many virtues; God forbid I should ever seek to lessen them, or wish them to be found insincere. I hope they are sincere, and that they will increase in number and merit every day. To his virtues I shall do justice; but I must also do justice to his faults, at least to those faults which are public, and which, for the sake of truth and of mankind, ought not to be concealed or disguised. Personal reflections will be carefully avoided; I hope I am in no danger of falling into them, for I bear no personal animosity against any man whatsoever: sometimes I may perhaps be keen; but I trust I shall never depart from the Christian and philosophic character.[Pg xxxiii]

"A scheme like this of mine cannot be popular, far less can it be lucrative. It will raise me enemies; it will expose me to the scrutiny of the most rigid criticism; it will make me be considered by many as a sullen and illiberal bigot. I trust, however, in Providence, and in the goodness of my cause, that my attempts in behalf of truth shall not be altogether ineffectual, and that my labours shall be attended with some utility to my fellow-creatures. This, in my estimation, will do much more than counterbalance all the inconveniences I have any reason to apprehend. I have already fallen on evil tongues (as Milton says)

[14] Mr. Hume, who at an early period had been the patron of Blacklock. Long before the date of this letter they had ceased to have any intercourse.

on account of this intended publication. It has been reported, that I had written a most scurrilous paper against Mr. Hume, and was preparing to publish it when a friend of mine interposed, and, with very great difficulty, prevailed on me to suppress it, because he knew it would hurt or ruin my character. Such is the treatment I have to expect from one set of people. I was so provoked when I first heard this calumny that I deliberated whether I should not throw my papers into the fire, with a *Si populus vult decipi, decipiatur*: but I rejected that thought; for so many persons have told me, that it was my *duty* to publish these papers, that I almost began to think so myself. Many have urged me to publish them; none ever dissuaded me. The gentleman, named in the report, read the essay, and returned it with the highest commendations; but I do not recollect that he ever spoke a syllable about publishing or suppressing it. But I have certainly tired you with so long a detail, about so trifling a matter as my works. However, I thought it necessary to say something by way of apology for them, for I find that your good opinion is of too much consequence to my peace, to suffer me to neglect any opportunity of cultivating it."

The *Essay on Truth* being now finished, our author was desirous of selling the MS. to some bookseller, in order that he might avoid all risk to himself in the publication, and intrusted the care of this matter to Sir William Forbes and Mr. Arbuthnot. His two friends, however, having applied to the bookseller, whom they imagined the most proper person to publish the work, were

vexed by his positive refusal to purchase it, although he had no objection to print it on Beattie's account. In this difficulty they generously resolved to become themselves the purchasers of the first edition. "I therefore," says Sir William Forbes, "wrote to him [Beattie] (nothing surely but the truth, although, I confess, not the whole truth,) that the manuscript was sold for fifty guineas, which I remitted to him by a bank bill; and I added, that we had stipulated with the bookseller who was to print the book, that we should be partners in the publication."

At length in May, 1770, the *Essay on Truth* was given to the world. As it had been seen in manuscript by several eminent literary characters, and as it was understood to be a direct attack on the philosophy of Hume (who was then in the height of his popularity,) its appearance excited immediate notice. It has been said, that on its publication, Hume spoke of Beattie with great bitterness, complaining (and I am forced to allow that there was some cause for the complaint) that he had not used him like a gentleman: it has even been asserted that he could not endure the name of our author to be mentioned in his presence. I suspect that in all this there is great exaggeration. The placid temper of Hume was not likely to be much ruffled by any thing that might be written against his system; his friends and admirers were probably more disturbed by the attack than the philosopher himself. In less than four years five large editions of the *Essay* were circulated, and translations of it were made into French and other foreign languages.

From the rugged paths of philosophy Beattie turned once more into the flowery walks of poesy. In 1771, the First Book of *The Minstrel* was published without the author's name. Its success was complete. The voice of every critic was loud in its praise; and before the Second Book appeared (in 1774), four editions of the First had been dispersed throughout the kingdom. The following elegant and touching encomium was passed upon the poem by Lord Lyttelton, in a letter to Mrs. Montagu, who had put the First Book into the hands of that virtuous nobleman:

"Hill Street, 8th March, 1771.

"I read your 'Minstrel' last night, with as much rapture as poetry, in her noblest, sweetest charms, ever raised in my soul. It seemed to me that my once most beloved minstrel, Thomson, was come down from heaven, refined by the converse of purer spirits than those he lived with here, to let me hear him sing again the beauties of nature, and the finest feelings of virtue, not with human, but with angelic strains! I beg you to express my gratitude to the poet for the pleasure he has given me."

Of the same date with the preceding letter, Beattie received one from Gray, containing many minute remarks on his poem. As it consists almost entirely of verbal criticism, it scarcely admits of quotation: a single short extract may however be given from it:

"St. 11. *O, how canst thou renounce*,[15] &c. [Pg xxxvii]But

[15] "O how canst thou renounce the boundless storeOf charms which Nature to her votary yields!The warbling woodland, the resounding shore,The pomp of groves, and

this, of all others, is my favourite stanza. It is true poetry; it is inspiration; only (to show it is mortal) there is one blemish; the word *garniture* suggesting an idea of dress, and, what is worse, of French dress."

When the poem was reprinted, one or two slight alterations were made in deference to the opinion of Gray.

In a letter to the Dowager Lady Forbes, 12th October, 1772, our author confesses that in the character of Edwin he meant to paint himself:

"From the questions your Ladyship is pleased to propose in the conclusion of your letter, as well as from some things I have had the honour to hear you advance in conversation, I find you are willing to suppose that, in Edwin, I have given only a picture of myself, as I was in my younger days. I confess the supposition is not groundless. I have made him take pleasure in the scenes in which I took pleasure, and entertain sentiments similar to those of which, even in my early youth, I had repeated experience. The scenery of a mountainous country, the ocean, the [Pg xxxviii]sky, thoughtfulness and retirement, and sometimes melancholy objects and ideas, had charms in my eyes, even when I was a schoolboy: and at a time when I was so far from being able to express, that I did not understand

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garniture of fields;All that the genial ray of morning gilds,And all that echoes to the song of even,All that the mountain's sheltering bosom shields,And all the dread magnificence of heaven,O, how canst thou renounce, and hope to be forgiven!""I have often wished," says Beattie, in a note on Gray's letter, "to alter this same word [*garniture*], but have not yet been able to hit upon a better."

my own feelings, or perceive the tendency of such pursuits and amusements; and as to poetry and music, before I was ten years old I could play a little on the violin, and was as much master of Homer and Virgil as Pope's and Dryden's translations could make me."

The intense thought which Beattie had devoted to the composition of the *Essay on Truth* having materially injured his health, he was advised by his physicians to try the remedy of change of scene. He accordingly set out on a journey to London, and arrived there in the beginning of autumn, 1771. He was no longer the obscure individual who had visited it in 1763;[16] he was now the triumphant adversary of scepticism, and the author of the admired *Minstrel*; a man whom the most distinguished characters in the literary and fashionable world were prepared to treat with attention and respect. Among several letters of introduction, which he carried with him, was one from Dr. Gregory, of Edinburgh, to Mrs. Montagu. At the splendid and hospitable mansion of this celebrated lady, Beattie became acquainted with various persons, both male and female, who were then the chief ornaments of London society; and he used to dwell with delight on the recollections of her more private parties, made up of Lord Lyttelton, Mrs. Carter, and a few others, who spent their evenings in the most unreserved conversation on literary, moral, or religious subjects. From this time, Mrs. Montagu continued to be one of his firmest friends;

[16] See p. xv.

and their epistolary correspondence closed only with her life. The politeness and kindness of Hawkesworth, Armstrong, Garrick, and Johnson, also contributed much to render pleasant his visit to the metropolis. Concerning the last illustrious man he writes thus: "Johnson has been greatly misrepresented. I have passed several entire days with him, and found him extremely agreeable. The compliments he pays to my writings are so high that I have not the face to mention them." In December Beattie had returned to Aberdeen.

In 1772, his mother died, at the advanced age of fourscore, at the house of her affectionate son David, in the neighbourhood of Laurencekirk.

Towards the end of April, 1773, Beattie, accompanied by his wife, set out again for London. This journey was undertaken partly for the sake of his health and partly with a view to another object – the bettering of his circumstances. The emolument which he had derived from his writings bore unfortunately no proportion to the fame he had acquired; and the small income arising from his professorship afforded him the only means for supporting his family. During his former visit to the capital, in 1771, his English friends had been very desirous to procure for him some permanent provision; and it was well known that his Majesty had expressed approbation of his writings, and had even declared his intention of conferring some reward on the man who had laboured so successfully to advance the interests of religion. With several important letters of introduction – one addressed

to the Earl of Dartmouth – he now arrived in London, and was cordially welcomed by Mrs. Montagu, and his other friends. His reception by Lord Dartmouth was kind and courteous: soon after which, being summoned to wait on Lord North, he was told by that minister that an early opportunity should be taken to inform his Majesty of his arrival.

By some of his friends it had been suggested that Beattie should take orders, and enter the English church; but this mode of improving his fortunes he very properly rejected.[17] At last, by

[17] At a subsequent period, after the king had granted him a pension, he received two offers of church preferment in England – the one from Mr. Pitt, of Dorsetshire, of a living in that county worth £150 per annum, the other from Dr. Thomas, Bishop of Winchester, of a living in Hants, valued at £500 a year – neither of which he would accept. In the letter wherein he declines the second noble offer, he thus expresses himself:"I wrote the 'Essays on Truth' with the certain prospect of raising many enemies, with very faint hopes of attracting the public attention, and without any views of advancing my fortune. I published it, however, because I thought it might probably do a little good, by bringing to nought, or, at least, lessening the reputation of that wretched system of sceptical philosophy, which had made a most alarming progress, and done incredible mischief to this country. My enemies have been at great pains to represent my views, in that publication, as very different: and that my principal, or only motive was to make a book, and, if possible, to raise myself higher in the world. So that, if I were now to accept preferment in the church, I should be apprehensive that I might strengthen the hands of the gainsayer, and give the world some ground to believe that my love of truth was not quite so ardent, or so pure, as I had pretended."Besides, might it not have the appearance of levity and insincerity, and, by some, be construed into a want of principle, if I were, at these years (for I am now thirty-eight), to make such an important change in my way of life, and to quit, with no other *apparent* motive than that of bettering my circumstances, that church of which I have hitherto been a member? If my book has any tendency to do good, as I flatter myself it has, I would not, for the wealth of the Indies, do any thing to counteract that tendency; and I am

the advice of the Archbishop of York, a memorial was drawn up "expressing his services, his wants, and his wishes;" which, having been transmitted to Lord Dartmouth, was by him laid before the King, who, on that occasion, spoke of Beattie and his writings with high approbation, and signified a desire to see him.

Meantime the number of our author's acquaintances in the metropolis increased daily, and his society was eagerly courted by a long list of illustrious names. He now became personally known to a distinguished churchman, with whom, during the preceding year he had held some correspondence by letter – Dr. Porteus, then Rector of Lambeth, and finally Bishop of London; and the friendship which took place between them was sincere and lasting.

At the first levee, Beattie was presented by Lord Dartmouth to his Majesty, who for several minutes talked to him concerning his *Essay on Truth* in the most condescending and affable manner.

Soon after this, the University of Oxford, at the installation

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afraid that tendency might, in some measure be counteracted (at least in this country) if I were to give the adversary the least ground to charge me with inconsistency. It is true, that the force of my reasonings cannot be *really* affected by my character; truth is truth, whoever be the speaker; but even truth itself becomes less respectable, when spoken, or supposed to be spoken, by insincere lips."It has also been hinted to me, by several persons of very sound judgment, that what I have written, or may hereafter write in favour of religion, has a chance of being more attended to, if I continue a layman, than if I were to become a clergyman. Nor am I without apprehensions (though some of my friends think them ill founded) that, from entering so late in life, and from so remote a province, into the Church of England, some degree of ungracefulness, particularly in pronunciation, might adhere to my performances in public, sufficient to render them less pleasing, and consequently less useful."

of Lord North as its Chancellor, conferred on our author a very flattering mark of distinction, an honorary degree of Doctor of Laws.

At length the object of his wishes was attained. On the 20th of August, he received an official letter from the secretary of Lord North, informing him that the king had been pleased to allow him a pension of two hundred pounds a year. Of the private interview, with which, a few days after he was honoured by their majesties, he has left the following account in his Diary:

"Tuesday, 24th August, set out for Dr. Majendie's at Kew-Green. The Doctor told me that he had not seen the King yesterday, but had left a note in writing, to intimate that I was to be at his house to-day; and that one of the King's pages had come to him this morning, to say 'that his Majesty would see me a little after twelve.' At twelve, the Doctor and I went to the King's house, at Kew. We had been only a few minutes in the hall, when the King and Queen came in from an airing; and, as they passed through the hall, the King called to me by name, and asked how long it was since I came from town. I answered, about an hour. 'I shall see you,' says he, 'in a little.' The Doctor and I waited a considerable time (for the King was busy), and then we were called into a large room, furnished as a library, where the King was walking about, and the Queen sitting in a chair. We were received in the most gracious manner possible by both their Majesties. I had the honour of a conversation with them (nobody else being present but Dr. Majendie) for upwards of an hour, on a

great variety of topics; in which both the King and Queen joined, with a degree of cheerfulness, affability, and ease, that was to me surprising, and soon dissipated the embarrassment which I felt at the beginning of the conference. They both complimented me, in the highest terms, on my 'Essay,' which, they said, was a book they always kept by them; and the King said he had one copy of it at Kew, and another in town, and immediately went and took it down from a shelf. I found it was the second edition. 'I never stole a book but one,' said his Majesty, 'and that was yours (speaking to me); I stole it from the Queen, to give it to Lord Hertford to read.' He had heard that the sale of Hume's 'Essays' had failed, since my book was published; and I told him what Mr. Strahan had told me, in regard to that matter. He had even heard of my being in Edinburgh last summer, and how Mr. Hume was offended on the score of my book. He asked many questions about the second part of the 'Essay,' and when it would be ready for the press. I gave him, in a short speech, an account of the plan of it; and said, my health was so precarious, I could not tell when it might be ready, as I had many books to consult before I could finish it; but, that if my health were good, I thought I might bring it to a conclusion in two or three years. He asked, how long I had been in composing my Essay? praised the caution with which it was written; and said, he did not wonder that it had employed me five or six years. He asked about my poems. I said, there was only one poem of my own on which I set any value (meaning the 'Minstrel,') and that it was first published about the same

time with the 'Essay.' My other poems, I said, were incorrect, being but juvenile pieces, and of little consequence, even in my own opinion. We had much conversation on moral subjects; from which both their Majesties let it appear that they were warm friends to Christianity; and so little inclined to infidelity, that they could hardly believe that any thinking man could really be an atheist, unless he could bring himself to believe that he made himself; a thought which pleased the King exceedingly; and he repeated it several times to the Queen. He asked, whether any thing had been written against me. I spoke of the late pamphlet, of which I gave an account, telling him, that I never had met with any man who had read it, except one Quaker. This brought on some discourse about the Quakers, whose moderation and mild behaviour the King and Queen commended. I was asked many questions about the Scots universities; the revenues of the Scots clergy; their mode of praying and preaching; the medical college of Edinburgh; Dr. Gregory (of whom I gave a particular character), and Dr. Cullen; the length of our vacation at Aberdeen, and the closeness of our attendance during the winter; the number of students that attend my lectures; my mode of lecturing, whether from notes, or completely written lectures; about Mr. Hume, and Dr. Robertson, and Lord Kinnoull, and the Archbishop of York, &c. &c. &c. His Majesty asked what I thought of my new acquaintance, Lord Dartmouth? I said there was something in his air and manner which I thought not only agreeable, but enchanting, and that he seemed to me to

be one of the best of men; a sentiment in which both their Majesties heartily joined. 'They say that Lord Dartmouth is an enthusiast,' said the King, 'but surely he says nothing on the subject of religion, but what every Christian may, and ought to say.' He asked, whether I did not think the English language on the decline at present? I answered in the affirmative; and the King agreed, and named the 'Spectator' as one of the best standards of the language. When I told him that the Scots clergy sometimes prayed a quarter, or even half an hour at a time, he asked whether that did not lead them into repetitions? I said, it often did. 'That,' said he, 'I don't like in prayers; and excellent as our liturgy is, I think it somewhat faulty in that respect.' 'Your majesty knows,' said I, 'that three services are joined in one in the ordinary church service, which is one cause of those repetitions.' 'True,' he replied, 'and that circumstance also makes the service too long.' From this he took occasion to speak of the composition of the church liturgy; on which he very justly bestowed the highest commendation. 'Observe,' his Majesty said, 'how flat those occasional prayers are, that are now composed, in comparison with the old ones.' When I mentioned the smallness of the church livings in Scotland, he said, 'he wondered how men of liberal education would choose to become clergymen there;' and asked, 'whether in the remote parts of the country, the clergy, in general were not very ignorant?' I answered, 'No, for that education was very cheap in Scotland, and that the clergy, in general, were men of good sense, and competent learning.'

He asked whether we had any good preachers at Aberdeen? I said, yes, and named Campbell and Gerard, with whose names, however, I did not find that he was acquainted. Dr. Majendie mentioned Dr. Oswald's 'Appeal' with commendation; I praised it too and the queen took down the name, with a view to send for it. I was asked, whether I knew Dr. Oswald? I answered, I did not; and said, that my book was published before I read his; that Dr. O. was well known to Lord Kinnoull, who had often proposed to make us acquainted. We discussed a great many other topics; for the[Pg xlviii] conversation, as before observed, lasted for upwards of an hour, without any intermission. The Queen bore a large share in it. Both the King and her Majesty showed a great deal of good sense, acuteness, and knowledge, as well as of good nature and affability. At last the king took out his watch (for it was now almost three o'clock, his hour of dinner), which Dr. Majendie and I took as a signal to withdraw. We accordingly bowed to their Majesties, and I addressed the King in these words: 'I hope, Sir, your Majesty will pardon me, if I take this opportunity to return you my humble and most grateful acknowledgments, for the honour you have been pleased to confer upon me.' He immediately answered, 'I think I could do no less for a man who has done so much service to the cause of Christianity. I shall always be glad of an opportunity to show the good opinion I have of you.' The Queen sate all the while, and the King stood, sometimes walking about a little. Her Majesty speaks the English language with surprising elegance, and little

or nothing of a foreign accent. There is something wonderfully captivating in her manner; so that if she were only of the rank of a private gentlewoman, one could not help taking notice of her, as one of the most agreeable women in the world. Her face is much more pleasing than any of her pictures; and in the expression of her eyes, and in her smile, there is something peculiarly engaging. When the Doctor and I came out, 'Pray,' said I, 'how did I behave? Tell me honestly, for I am not accustomed to conversations of this kind.' 'Why, perfectly well,' answered he, 'and just as you ought to do.' 'Are you sure of that?' said I. 'As sure,' he replied, 'as of my own existence: and you may be assured of it too, when I tell you, that if there had been any thing in your manner or conversation which was not perfectly agreeable, your conference would have been at an end in eight or ten minutes at most.' The Doctor afterwards told me, that it was a most uncommon thing for a private man, and a commoner, to be honoured with so long an audience. I dined with Dr. and Mrs. Majendie, and their family, and returned to town in the evening, very much pleased with the occurrences of the day."

At this time, Sir Joshua Reynolds, having requested Beattie to sit for his picture, produced a likeness of him, which is generally regarded as one of the finest works of that admirable artist. He is represented in his Oxford gown of Doctor of Laws, with his famous Essay under his arm; while beside him is Truth, habited as an Angel, holding in one hand a pair of scales, and with the other thrusting down three frightful figures, emblematic of

Prejudice, Scepticism, and Folly.[18] Of this picture Sir Joshua made a present to Beattie, who set a due value on so noble a composition, and preserved it with the utmost care.

After an absence of a little more than five months, he returned to Aberdeen.

A striking proof how highly the character and talents of Beattie were appreciated, even by those to whom he was personally unknown, occurred in October of this year (1773), when the chair of Moral Philosophy in the University of Edinburgh was offered to him by the electors, the magistrates of the city. He, however, declined accepting it, "Though my fortune" (he writes to Sir William Forbes, on the subject) "were as narrow now as it lately was, I should still incline rather to remain in quiet where I am, than, by becoming a member of the University of Edinburgh, to place myself within the reach of those (few as they are) who have been pleased to let the world

[18] So Beattie names the figures in one of his letters; but Sir William Forbes tells us they are supposed to mean Sophistry, Scepticism, and Infidelity. The worthy Baronet proceeds to observe:"Because one of these was a lean figure and the [an] other a fat one, people of lively imaginations pleased themselves with finding in them the portraits of Voltaire and Mr. Hume. But Sir Joshua, I have reason to believe, had no such thought when he painted those figures."Surely Sir William had never read all the letters which he printed in his *Life of Beattie*, for in vol. ii. p. 42, octavo ed., we find the great painter writing to our poet as follows, in February, 1774:"Mr. Hume has heard from somebody that he is introduced in the picture, not much to his credit; there is only a figure, covering his face with his hands, which they may call Hume or any body else; *it is true it has a tolerable broad back. As for Voltaire, I intended he should be one of the group.*"This fine picture is now at Aberdeen, in the possession of Beattie's niece, Mrs. Glennie.

know that they do not wish me well." He alludes to the enemies whom his *Essay on Truth* had raised up.

The Second Book of *The Minstrel*, together with a new and corrected edition of the First, appeared in 1774, the author's name being now added. The poem, thus enlarged, suffered no diminution of its popularity.

The following year, Beattie and his wife spent several weeks in London, residing during the chief part of the time with Dr. Porteus, one of his kindest and most zealous friends. On this occasion, having shown himself at court, he was immediately recognized by the King, who spoke to him very graciously, and made several inquiries concerning his studies.

To a new and improved edition in quarto, of the *Essay on Truth*, printed by subscription,[19] in 1776, our author appended three other Essays: *On Poetry and Music, as they affect the Mind*, *On Laughter and Ludicrous Composition*, and *On the Utility of*

[19] When Beattie was in London, in 1773, and when it was doubtful whether government would ever make any provision for him, his friends there set on foot a subscription for this work. "It was a thing," says he, in a letter to Lady Mayne, January, 1774, "of a private nature entirely; projected not by me, but by some of my friends, who had condescended to charge themselves with the whole trouble of it: it was never meant to be made public, nor put into the hands of booksellers, nor carried on by solicitation, but was to be considered as a *voluntary* mark of the approbation of some persons of rank and fortune, who wished it to be known that they patronized me on account of what I had written in defence of truth," &c. Prefixed to the volume is a list of nearly five hundred subscribers, among whom are many distinguished characters in church and state.

Classical Learning. In 1777,[20] he gave to the press a new edition of *The Minstrel*, to which he added a few of his minor poems: this volume (he says in the preface) contains "all the verses of which I am willing to be considered as the author." In 1778,[21] he printed for private circulation a *Letter to Dr. Blair, on the improvement of Psalmody in Scotland*. In 1779, he published, for the use of the young men who attended his Lectures, a *List of Scotticisms*, to the amount of about two hundred. And in 1780, he contributed some thoughts *On Dreaming* to the well known periodical paper, *The Mirror*.

The following portion of a letter from Dr. Johnson to Beattie shows how sincerely our author was esteemed by the great moralist:

"Bolt Court, Fleet Street, 21st August, 1780.

"More years than I have any delight to reckon have past since you and I saw one another. Of this, however, there is no reason for making any reprehensory complaint, *sic fata ferunt*: but, methinks, there might pass some small interchange of regard between us. If you say that I ought to have written, I now write; and I write to tell you, that I have much kindness for you and

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[20] A spurious edition of his Juvenile Poems, with some which he never wrote, from Dodsley's *Collection*, was put forth in 1780. This volume he disowned in a public advertisement.

[21] Perhaps it was not printed till the beginning of the following year. In a letter to Beattie, dated Feb. 1st, 1779, Mrs. Montagu says, "I was much pleased with your pamphlet on Psalmody."

Mrs. Beattie, and that I wish your health better, and your life long. Try change of air, and come a few degrees southward; a softer climate may do you both good. Winter is coming on, and London will be warmer, and gayer, and busier, and more fertile of amusement than Aberdeen."

In 1781, Beattie made another journey to London, taking with him his eldest son, James Hay Beattie.[22] While there, we find him writing thus to Sir William Forbes:

"1st June.

"I have been visiting all my friends again and again, and found them as affectionate and attentive as ever. Death has indeed deprived me of some since I was last here, of Garrick, and Armstrong, and poor Harry Smith; but I have still many left."… "Johnson grows in grace as he grows in years. He not only has better health and a fresher complexion than ever he had before (at least since I knew him), but he has contracted a gentleness of manners which pleases every body."

"28th June.

"I thought it my duty to appear at the levee before I left London; and accordingly the week before last I went to court. The king had not seen me for six years, and yet, to my surprise, knew me at first sight. He spoke to me with his wonted condescension and affability; and paid me a very polite

[22] He was born in 1768, and was named after James Hay, Earl of Errol, our author's early patron.

compliment on the subject of my writings."

His *Dissertations, Moral and Critical*, were published in 1783.

A passage from a letter of the poet Cowper to the Rev. William Unwin, 5th April, 1784,[23] must not be omitted here:

"If you have not his poem, called the 'The Minstrel,' and cannot borrow it, I must beg you to buy it for me; for, though I cannot afford to deal largely in so expensive a commodity as books, I must afford to purchase at least the poetical works of Beattie."

His health impaired, and his peace of mind destroyed, by the melancholy condition of his wife (who, labouring under confirmed insanity, was now removed from her family), we need not wonder that Beattie should endeavour to forget his domestic griefs in the society of his English friends, to whom

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[23] Writing from Edinburgh, 28th May, 1784, to his niece, Miss Valentine (now Mrs. Glennie), Beattie describes the sensation caused in that city by the performances of Mrs. Siddons. He says that he met her at the house of Lord Buchan; that he played to her many Scotch airs on the violoncello, with which she was much gratified; and that "she sung 'Queen Mary's Complaint' to admiration, and I had the honour to accompany her on the bass." – Forbes's *Life of Beattie*, vol. ii. p. 324, octavo ed.I am informed, by the incomparable actress in question, that the quotation just given contains an utter falsehood, which, when Forbes's Life of our author first appeared, in 1806, she read with astonishment. She remembers perfectly having been introduced to Beattie at Lord Buchan's, but she is quite certain she did *not* sing either Queen Mary's Complaint or any other song; and she observes, that if she *had* sung to his accompaniment, the circumstance would have been so striking that it could not possibly have escaped her recollection.Qy. Has Beattie's letter been mutilated, the person who transcribed it for the press having by mistake omitted some lines? and do the words "she sung," in the concluding sentence, refer to some other more musical lady, and not to Mrs. Siddons?

he was ever welcome. During the year 1784, after passing some time in London, he spent a month with Dr. Porteus (who had now attained the rank of Bishop of Chester), at the beautiful parsonage of Hunton, near Maidstone, which he characterizes as "the mansion of peace, piety, and cheerfulness." He also visited Mrs. Montagu, at her seat, called Sandleford, in Berks.

In 1786, his *Evidences of the Christian Religion*, were published. A remark which he makes in a letter, while engaged in the composition of this judicious summary, is worth quoting: "Whether this work shall ever be of use to others, I know not; but this I know, that it has been of considerable benefit to myself. For though, when I entered upon it, I understood my subject well enough to entertain no doubt of the goodness of my cause, yet I find, as I advance, new light continually breaking in upon me."

The receipt of the following letter could hardly fail to gratify our author:

"Philadelphia, 1st August, 1786.

"The American revolution, which divided the British empire, made no breach in the republic of letters. As a proof of this, a stranger to your person, and a citizen of a country lately hostile to yours, has expressed his obligations to you for the knowledge and pleasure he has derived from your excellent writings by procuring your admission into the American Philosophical Society; a certificate of which, subscribed by our illustrious president, Dr. Franklin, and the other officers of the society, you will receive by the next vessel that sails to any port in North Britain from this

city.

"The stranger alluded to finished his studies in medicine in Edinburgh in the year 1769, and has ever since taught chemistry and medicine in the college of Philadelphia. His name (with the greatest respect for yours) is,

"Benjamin Rush."

The next year, with his eldest son for his companion, he repaired again to London. While there, he writes thus to his niece, Miss Valentine, now Mrs. Glennie:

"London, 20th July, 1787.

"I am just returned from Windsor, where I passed three days. I went thither, partly to see some friends, but chiefly that I might pay my respects to the King and Queen. They both received me in the most gracious manner. I saw the King first on the terrace, where he knew me at first sight, and did me the honour to converse with me a considerable time. Next morning I saw him again at prayers in his chapel, where he was pleased to introduce me to the Queen, who inquired very kindly after my health; observed, that many years had passed since she saw me last; regretted the bad weather which I had met with at Windsor (for it rained incessantly,) which, said she, has made your friends see less of you than they wished; and, after some other conversation, her Majesty and the Princess Elizabeth, who attended her, made a slight courtesy, and stepped into the carriage that waited for them at the chapel door. The King remained with us for some

time longer, and talked of various matters."

Our author then proceeded to visit Dr. Porteus at Hunton, and Mrs. Montagu at Sandleford, but was obliged to quit the latter place sooner than he had intended, on account of the illness of his son, who shewed symptoms of that consumptive complaint to which he afterwards fell a victim. For the sake of medical advice Beattie carried him back to the metropolis, and from thence, by very easy stages, to Aberdeen. Soon after his return to Scotland, the invalid improved so much in health that he was able to take upon him part of the management of the class of Moral Philosophy in the Marischal College, having been appointed in June of this year (when he was not quite nineteen) assistant professor to his father.

In 1790, Beattie put forth the first volume of his *Elements of Moral Science*; and superintended an edition of Addison's Periodical Papers, adding a few notes to Tickell's Life of that author, and to Johnson's Remarks on his Prose Writings. The second volume of the *Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh*, published during this year, contains 'Remarks on some Passages of the Sixth Book of the Æneid,' from Beattie's pen.

He had now to suffer the dire bereavement which he had long foreseen, the loss of his eldest son, the object of his fondest affection. He thus informs the Duchess of Gordon of the melancholy event:

"Aberdeen, 1st December, 1790.

"Knowing with what kindness and condescension your grace takes an interest in every thing that concerns me and my little family, I take the liberty to inform you, that my son James is dead; that the last duties to him are now paid; and that I am endeavouring to return, with the little ability that is left me, and with entire submission to the will of Providence, to the ordinary business of life. I have lost one who was always a pleasing companion; but who, for the last five or six years, was one of the most entertaining and instructive companions that ever man was blest with: for his mind comprehended almost every science; he was a most attentive observer of life and manners; a master of classical learning; and he possessed an exuberance of wit and humour, a force of understanding, and a correctness and delicacy of taste, beyond any other person of his age I have ever known.

"He was taken ill in the night of the 30th of November, 1789; and from that time his decline commenced. It was long what physicians call a nervous atrophy; but towards the end of June, symptoms began to appear of the lungs being affected. Goats' milk, and afterwards asses' milk, were procured for him in abundance; and such exercise as he could bear, he regularly took; these means lengthened his days no doubt, and alleviated his sufferings, which indeed were not often severe: but, in spite of all that could be done, he grew weaker and weaker, and died the 19th of November, 1790, without complaint or pain, without even a groan or a sigh; retaining to the last moment the use of his rational faculties; indeed, from first to last, not one delirious

word ever escaped him. He lived twenty-two years and thirteen days. Many weeks before it came, he saw death approaching, and he met it with such composure and pious resignation, as may no doubt be equalled, but cannot be surpassed.

"He has left many things in writing, serious and humorous, scientific and miscellaneous, prose and verse, Latin and English; but it will be a long time before I shall be able to harden my heart so far as to revise them."

In April of the following year, Beattie again travelled southwards, accompanied by Montagu,[24] his second son and only surviving child. They remained some weeks in Edinburgh, and then journeyed slowly to London, which after a short stay they quitted for the summer residence of Dr. Porteus, who was now elevated to the see of the metropolis. The tranquillity of Fulham Palace, and the kind attentions of its inhabitants, contributed greatly to amend the health and raise the spirits of our author; and he seems to have enjoyed the company of the distinguished persons with whom he had an opportunity of associating. "Last week," he writes to Sir William Forbes, 30th June, 1791, "I made a morning visit to Mr. Pitt. I had heard him spoken of as a grave and reserved man; but saw nothing of it. He gave me a very frank, and indeed affectionate reception; and was so cheerful, and in his conversation so easy, that I almost thought myself in the company rather of an old acquaintance than of a

[24] He was so named after Mrs. Montagu. From one of Beattie's letters, dated 1789, it appears that she had made a handsome present of money to her godson.

great statesman. He was pleased to pay me some very obliging compliments, asked about my health, and how I meant to pass the summer; spoke of the Duchess of Gordon, the improvements of Edinburgh, and various other matters: and when I told him, I knew not what apology to make for intruding upon him, said, that no apology was necessary, for that he was very glad to see me, and desired to see me again." Before returning to Scotland, the travellers went to Bath, and from thence to Sandleford, the seat of Mrs. Montagu.

The second volume of the *Elements of Moral Science* appeared in 1793. During the same year the sudden death of his favourite sister, Mrs. Valentine, increased the domestic sorrows of Beattie. His health was at this period so greatly impaired, that being unable to attend to his duties of Professor in the Marischal College, he engaged his old pupil, Mr. Glennie, as an assistant: occasionally, however, he continued to lecture to his class till the commencement of the winter session of 1797.

For some time past he had occupied himself in the melancholy yet pleasing task of editing a volume of the compositions of his eldest son. From a pardonable partiality for the writings of a beloved child, and from his not very accurate attainments in classical scholarship, he admitted into the collection several pieces, both English and Latin, which fall considerably below mediocrity. A few copies of the work were privately printed in 1794, under the title of *Essays and Fragments in Prose and Verse, by James Hay Beattie*, and were "offered as presents to

those friends with whom the author was particularly acquainted or connected."[25] Though it undoubtedly shows that the deceased was a young man of uncommon quickness of talent, and the most indefatigable application, it exhibits nothing which has a claim to be considered as the offspring of genius.[26]969798991001011021031041

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[25] I possess a copy of it which bears the following inscription:"To William Hayley, Esq.,in testimony of the utmost respect,esteem, and gratitude, from J. Beattie1st January, 1796."On one of its fly-leaves the ever-ready pen of Hayley has written the subjoined sonnet:TO DOCTOR BEATTIE, IN GRATEFUL ACKNOWLEDGMENT OFHIS VERY INTERESTING PRESENT"Bard of the North! I thank thee with my tearsFor this fond work of thy paternal hand:It bids the buried youth before me standIn nature's softest light, which love endears.Parents like thee, whose grief the world reveres,Faithful to pure affection's proud command,For a lost child have lasting honours plann'd,To give in fame what fate denied in years.The filial form of Icarus was wroughtBy his afflicted sire, the sire of art!And Tullia's fane engross'd her father's heart:That fane rose only in perturbed thought;But sweet perfection crowns, as truth begun,This Christian image of thy happier son."

[26] It was afterwards published for sale in 1799. I extract from it a jeu d'esprit – one of those pieces which Beattie printed, in opposition to the advice of Sir William Forbes and some other grave friends.THE MODERN TIPPLING PHILOSOPHERSFather Hodge96 had his pipe and his dram,And at night, his cloy'd thirst to awaken,He was served with a rasher of ham,Which procured him the surname of Bacon.He has shown that, though logical scienceAnd dry theory oft prove unhandy,Honest Truth will ne'er set at defianceExperiment, aided by brandy.Des Cartes bore a musket, they tell us,Ere he wished, or was able, to write,And was noted among the brave fellows,Who are bolder to tipple than fight.Of his system the cause and designWe no more can be pos'd to explain: —The materia subtilis was wine,And the vortices whirl'd in his brain.Old Hobbes, as his name plainly shows,At a hob-nob was frequently tried:That all virtue from selfishness roseHe believ'd, and all laughter from pride.97The truth of his creed he would brag on,Smoke his pipe, murder Homer,98 and quaff,Then staring, as drunk as a dragon,In the pride of his heart he would laugh.Sir Isaac discover'd, it seems,The nature of colors and light,In remarking the tremulous beamsThat swom

The most interesting portion of the volume is the biographical

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on his wandering sight.Ever sapient, sober though seldom,From experience attraction he found,By observing, when no one upheld him,That his wise head fell souse on the ground.As to Berkley's philosophy – he hasLeft his poor pupils nought to inherit,But a swarm of deceitful ideasKept like other monsters, in spirit.99Tar-drinkers can't think what's the matter,That their health does not mend, but decline:Why, they take but some wine to their water,He took but some water to wine.One Mandeville once, or Man-devil,(Either name you may give as you please)By a brain ever brooding on evil,Hatch'd a monster call'd Fable of Bees,Vice, said he, aggrandizes a people;100By this light let my conduct be view'd;I swagger, swear, guzzle, and tipple:And d – ye, 'tis all for your good.David Hume ate a swinging great dinner,And grew every day fatter and fatter;And yet the huge hulk of a sinnerSaid there was neither spirit nor matter.Now there's no sober man in the nation,Who such nonsense could write, speak, or think:It follows, by fair demonstration,That he philosophiz'd in his drink.As a smuggler, even Priestley could sin;Who, in hopes the poor gauger of frightening,While he fill'd the case-bottles with gin,Swore he fill'd them with thunder and lightning.101In his cups, (when Locke's laid on the shelf),Could he speak, he would frankly confess t' ye,That unable to manage himself,He puts his whole trust in Necessity.If the young in rash folly engage,How closely continues the evil!Old Franklin retains, as a sage,The thirst he acquired when a devil.102That charging drives fire from a phial,It was natural for him to think,After finding, from many a trial,That drought may be kindled by drink.A certain high priest could explain,103How the soul is but nerve at the most;And how Milton had glands in his brain,That secreted the Paradise Lost.And sure it is what they deserve,Of such theories if I aver it,They are not even dictates of nerve,But mere muddy suggestions of claret.Our Holland Philosophers say, GinIs the true philosophical drink,As it made Doctor Hartley imagineThat to shake is the same as to think.104For, while drunkenness throbb'd in his brain,The sturdy materialist chose (O fye!)To believe its vibrations not pain,But wisdom, and downright philosophy.Ye sages, who shine in my verse,On my labours with gratitude think,Which condemn not the faults they rehearse,But impute all your sin to your drink.In drink, poets, philosophers, mob, err;Then excuse if my satire e'er nips ye:When I praise, think me prudent and sober,If I blame, be assur'd I am tipsy.

[96] Roger Bacon, the father of experimental philosophy. He flourished in the thirteenth century.

sketch prefixed to it by the afflicted father, a memoir of exquisite simplicity and pathos. The account given by Beattie of the method which he adopted in imparting to his son the first idea of a Supreme Being is too striking to be omitted here:

"The doctrines of religion I wished to impress on his mind, as soon as it might be prepared to receive them; but I did not see the propriety of making him commit to memory theological sentences, or any sentences which it was not possible for him to understand. And I was desirous to make a trial how far his own reason could go in tracing out, with a little direction, the great and first principle of all religion, the being of God. The following fact is mentioned, not as a proof of superior sagacity in him (for I have no[Pg lxviii] doubt that most children would in like circumstances think as he did), but merely as a moral or logical experiment: He had reached his fifth (or sixth) year,

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[97] See *The Spectator*, No. 47.

[98] Hobbes was a great smoker, and wrote what some have been pleased to call a Translation of Homer.

[99] He taught that the external universe has no existence, but an ideal one, in the mind (or *spirit*) that perceives it; and he thought tar-water a universal remedy.

[100] Private vices public benefits.

[101] Electrical batteries.

[102] Bred a printer. This was written long before Dr. Franklin's death.

[103] Dr. L., Bp. of C., is probably the person here alluded to. He was a zealous materialist.

[104] He resolved Perception and Thinking into *vibrations*, and (what he called) *vibratiuncles* of the brain.

knew the alphabet, and could read a little; but had received no particular information with respect to the Author of his being; because I thought he could not yet understand such information; and because I had learned, from my own experience, that to be made to repeat words not understood is extremely detrimental to the faculties of a young mind. In a corner of a little garden, without informing any person of the circumstance, I wrote in the mould, with my finger, the three initial letters of his name; and sowing garden-cresses in the furrows, covered up the seed, and smoothed the ground. Ten days after, he came running to me, and with astonishment in his countenance, told me that his name was growing in the garden. I smiled at the report, and seemed inclined to disregard it; but he insisted on my going to see what had happened. Yes, said I carelessly, on coming to the place, I see it is so; but there is nothing in this worth notice; it is mere chance; and I went away. He followed me and taking hold of my coat, said, with some earnestness, It could not be mere chance; for that somebody must have contrived matters so as to produce it. – I pretend not to give his words, or my own, for I have forgotten both; but I give the substance of what passed between us in such language as we both understood. – So you think, I said, that what appears so regular as the letters of your name, cannot be by chance. Yes, said he, with firmness, I think so. Look at yourself, I replied, and consider your hands and fingers, your legs and feet, and other limbs; are not they regular in their appearance, and useful to you? He said, they were. Came you then hither, said

I, by chance? No, he answered, that cannot be; something must have made me. And who is that something? I asked. He said he did not know. (I took particular notice, that he did not say, as Rousseau fancies a child in like circumstances would say, that his parents made him.) I had now gained the point I aimed at, and saw that his reason taught him (though he could not so express it) that what begins to be must have a cause, and that what is formed with regularity must have an intelligent cause. I therefore told him the name of the Great Being who made him and all the world; concerning whose adorable nature I gave him such information as I thought he could in some measure comprehend. The lesson affected him greatly, and he never forgot either it, or the circumstance that introduced it."

After the loss of this highly-gifted youth, the only tie which bound Beattie to the world was his second son, who, though far inferior to the deceased in learning, was endowed with no ordinary talents.[27] Just as our author was anxiously forming plans for his future establishment in life, Montagu was unexpectedly carried off by a fever of only a few days' continuance, in the eighteenth year of his age. Beattie thus communicates to Sir William Forbes the intelligence of his death:

"Aberdeen, 14th March, 1796.

"Our plans relating to Montagu are all at an end. I am sorry to

[27] "I have been assured by those who were intimately acquainted with both, that of the two brothers, Montagu was in many respects the superior."Bower's Life of Beattie, 1804, p. 210.

give you the pain of being informed, that he died this morning at five. His disorder was a fever, from which at first we had little apprehension; but it cut him off in five days. He himself thought from the beginning that it would be fatal; and, before the delirium came on, spoke with great composure and Christian piety of his approaching dissolution: he even gave some directions about his funeral. The delirium was very violent, and continued till within a few minutes of his death, when he was heard to repeat in a whisper the Lord's prayer, and began an unfinished sentence, of which nothing could be heard but the words *incorruptible glory*. Pious sentiments prevailed in his mind through life, and did not leave him till death; nor then, I trust, did they leave him. Notwithstanding the extreme violence of his fever, he seemed to suffer little pain, either in body or in mind, and as his end drew near, a smile settled upon his countenance. I need not tell you that he had every attention that skilful and affectionate physicians could bestow. I give you the trouble to notify this event to Mr. Arbuthnot. I would have written to him, but have many things to mind, and but indifferent health. However, I heartily acquiesce in the dispensations of Providence, which are all good and wise. God bless you and your family.

"He will be much regretted; for wherever he went he was a very popular character."

Such an effect had this fresh calamity on the intellectual powers of Beattie, that a few days after Montagu's death, he experienced a temporary hut almost utter loss of memory

respecting him. Having searched every room in the house, he would say to his niece, Mrs. Glennie, "You may think it strange, but I must ask you if I have a son, and where he is?" She then felt herself under the painful necessity of calling to his recollection the sufferings of Montagu, the mention of which never failed to restore him to reason. Often with tears he would declare himself thankful that his children were in the grave, exclaiming, in allusion to their mother's malady, "How could I have borne to see their elegant minds mangled with madness!" On viewing the dead body of Montagu for the last time, he said, "I have now done with the world."

The following passages from two of his letters, written about this period, are deeply affecting. He tells the Rev. Dr. Laing, 10th April, 1796:

"I hope I am resigned, as my duty requires, and as I wish to be; but I have passed many a bitter hour, though on those occasions nobody sees me. I fear my reason is a little disordered, for I have sometimes thought of late, especially in a morning, that Montagu is not dead, though I seem to have a remembrance of a dream that he is. This you will say, what I myself believe, is a symptom not uncommon in cases similar to mine, and that I ought by all means to go from home as soon as I can. I will do so when the weather becomes tolerable."

To Sir William Forbes he says, 17th of the same month:

"I have been these many days resolving to write to you and Mr. Arbuthnot, to thank you for your very kind and sympathetic

letters, but various things have come in my way to prevent it. I need not pretend a hurry of business, for every-body knows I am not capable of any. A deep gloom hangs upon me, and disables all my faculties; and thoughts so strange sometimes occur to me as to make me 'fear that I am not,' as Lear says, 'in my perfect mind.' But I thank God I am entirely resigned to the divine will; and, though I am now childless, I have friends[Pg lxxiii] whose goodness to me, and other virtues, I find great comfort in recollecting. The physicians not only advise, but entreat, and indeed command me to go from home, and that without further delay; and I do seriously resolve to set out for Edinburgh to-morrow."

Though Beattie never from henceforth engaged in any kind of study, he still found some enjoyment in books, and still derived some pleasure from the society of a very few of his oldest friends. He almost entirely ceased to correspond, even with those whom he most valued; yet when he happened to receive a letter from any of them, his spirits were always excited for the rest of the day. Music, in which he had once delighted, had become disagreeable to him since the loss of his eldest son.[28] A few months, however, before Montagu's death, he had occasionally

[28] James Hay Beattie had a scientific knowledge of music, and, with the assistance of the Rev. Dr. Laing, had superintended the building an organ for himself. In one of our author's letters, 8th June, 1791, is the following passage:"The organ of Durham cathedral was too much for my feelings; for it brought too powerfully to my remembrance another organ, much smaller, indeed, but more interesting, which I can never hear any more."

played an accompaniment while Montagu sung; but now, when prevailed on to resume his favourite violoncello, he was always dissatisfied with his own performance. "My fingers," he writes to the Rev. Dr. Laing, 5th June, 1798, "have not strength to press down the strings."

In this state he continued till the beginning of April, 1799, when he was struck with palsy, which, for eight days, rendered him nearly incapable of utterance. At different times the disease repeated its attacks, the last of which, on the 5th of October, 1802, deprived him entirely of the power of motion. On the morning of the 18th of August, 1803, he expired without a struggle, in the sixty-eighth year of his age.

His remains were laid, according to his own desire, beside those of his children, in the church-yard of St. Nicholas, at Aberdeen; and a Latin inscription, from the pen of the late Dr. James Gregory, of Edinburgh, marks the spot of his interment.

In person he was of the middle size, of a broad, square make, which seemed to indicate a more robust constitution than he really possessed. In his gait there was something of a slouch. During his later years he grew corpulent and unwieldy; but a few months before his death his hulk was greatly diminished. His features were very regular; his complexion somewhat dark. His eyes were black, brilliant, full of a tender and melancholy expression, and, in the course of conversation with his friends, became extremely animated.

Though I am of opinion with Gilbert Wakefield, that the

maxim *De mortuis nil nisi* VERUM is better than *De mortuis nil nisi* BONUM, it is with pain that I touch on the reported failing of so truly good a man as Beattie. It has been asserted that towards the close of life he indulged to excess in the use of wine. In a letter to Mr. Arbuthnot, he says, "With the present pressure upon my mind, I should not be able to sleep, if I did not use wine as an opiate; it is less hurtful than laudanum, but not so effectual." He may, perhaps, have had too frequent recourse to so palatable a medicine, in the hope of banishing for a while the recollection of his sorrows; and if, under any circumstances, such a fault is to be regarded as venial, it may be excused in one who was a more than widowed husband and a childless father.

The prose writings of Beattie appear of late years to have fallen into disrepute; and the once celebrated *Essay on Truth* is at present as much undervalued as it was formerly overrated.

His fame now rests upon *The Minstrel* alone. Since its first publication, many poems of a far loftier and more original character have been produced in England; yet still does it maintain its popularity; and still in Edwin, that happy personification of the poetic temperament, do young and enthusiastic readers delight to recognize a picture of themselves. Though we cannot fail to regret that Beattie should have left it incomplete, yet we do not long for the concluding books from any interest which we take in the story, such as is excited by some other unfinished works of genius, the tale of *Cambuscan*, for instance, or the legend of *Christabel*. In *The Minstrel*,

indeed, there is but little invention; it is a poem of sentiment and description, conveying to us lessons of true philosophy in language of surpassing beauty, and displaying pictures of nature, in her romantic solitudes, painted by a master's hand. "On my once asking Dr. Beattie," says Sir William Forbes, "in what manner he had intended to employ his Minstrel, had he completed his original design of extending the poem to a third canto, he said, he proposed to have introduced a foreign enemy as invading his country, in consequence of which the Minstrel was to employ himself in rousing his countrymen to arms."[29] But surely such a conclusion would have formed too violent a contrast to the repose of the earlier books; and the charm which attaches us to the meditative Edwin, while a wanderer among the lonely hills and groves, would have been broken, or at least weakened, by placing him amid the throng of warriors and the din of arms.

With the exception of *The Hermit* and the following exquisite stanza[30] of *Retirement*, there is little worthy of particular notice in the minor poems of Beattie.

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[29] See, too, Beattie's letter to Blacklock, p. xv. of this memoir.

[30] Thy shades, thy silence now be mine,Thy charms my only theme;My haunt the hollow cliff, whose pineWaves o'er the gloomy stream:Whence the scar'd owl on pinions grayBreaks from the rustling boughs,And down the lone vale sails awayTo more profound repose.

ADVERTISEMENT

January, 1777.

Having lately seen in print some poems ascribed to me which I never wrote, and some of my own inaccurately copied, I thought it would not be improper to publish, in this little volume, all the verses of which I am willing to be considered as the author. Many others I did indeed write in the early part of my life; but they were in general so incorrect, that I would not rescue them from oblivion, even if a wish could do it.

Some of the few now offered to the Public would perhaps have been suppressed, if in making this collection I had implicitly followed my own judgment. But in so small a matter, who would refuse to submit his opinion to that of a friend?

It is of no consequence to the reader to know the date of any of these little poems. But some private reasons determined the author to add, that most of them were written many years age, and that the greatest part of the Minstrel, which is his latest attempt in this way, was composed in the year one thousand seven hundred and sixty-eight.

PREFACE TO THE MINSTREL

The design was to trace the progress of a Poetical Genius, born in a rude age, from the first dawning of fancy and reason, till that period at which he may be supposed capable of appearing in the world as a Minstrel, that is, as an itinerant Poet and Musician; – a character which, according to the notions of our forefathers, was not only respectable, but sacred.

I have endeavoured to imitate Spenser in the measure of his verse, and in the harmony, simplicity, and variety of his composition. Antique expressions I have avoided; admitting, however, some old words, where they seemed to suit the subject; but I hope none will be found that are now obsolete, or in any degree not intelligible to a reader of English poetry.

To those who may be disposed to ask, what could induce me to write in so difficult a measure, I can only answer that it pleases my ear, and seems, from its Gothic structure and original, to bear some relation to the subject and spirit of the Poem. It admits both simplicity and magnificence of sound and of language beyond any other stanza that I am acquainted with. It allows the sententiousness of the couplet, as well as the more complex modulation of blank verse. What some critics have remarked, of its uniformity growing at last tiresome to the ear, will be found to hold true, only when the poetry is faulty in other respects.

THE MINSTREL
BOOK I

Me vero primum dulces ante omnia Musæ,
Quarum sacra fero, ingenti perculsus amore,
Accipiant. – VIRG.

THE MINSTREL; OR, THE PROGRESS OF GENIUS. BOOK I

I

Ah! who can tell how hard it is to climb
The steep where Fame's proud temple shines afar!
Ah! who can tell how many a soul sublime
Has felt the influence of malignant star,
And waged with Fortune an eternal war;
Check'd by the scoff of Pride, by Envy's frown,
And Poverty's unconquerable bar,
In life's low vale remote has pined alone,
Then dropt into the grave, unpitied and unknown!

II

And yet the languor of inglorious days,
Not equally oppressive is to all:
Him who ne'er listen'd to the voice of praise,

The silence of neglect can ne'er appall.
There are, who, deaf to mad Ambition's call,
Would shrink to hear the obstreperous trump of Fame;
Supremely blest, if to their portion fall
Health, competence, and peace. Nor higher aim
Had he, whose simple tale these artless lines proclaim.

III

The rolls of fame I will not now explore;
Nor need I here describe, in learned lay,
How forth the Minstrel far'd in days of yore,
Right glad of heart, though homely in array;
His waving locks and beard all hoary gray;
While from his bending shoulder decent hung
His harp, the sole companion of his way,
Which to the whistling wind responsive rung:
And ever as he went some merry lay he sung.

IV

Fret not thyself, thou glittering child of pride,
That a poor villager inspires my strain;
With thee let Pageantry and Power abide:

The gentle Muses haunt the sylvan reign;
Where thro' wild groves at eve the lonely swain
Enraptur'd roams, to gaze on Nature's charms:
They hate the sensual, and scorn the vain,
The parasite their influence never warms,
Nor him whose sordid soul the love of gold alarms.

V

Though richest hues the peacock's plumes adorn,
Yet horror screams from his discordant throat.
Rise, sons of harmony, and hail the morn,
While warbling larks on russet pinions float;
Or seek at noon the woodland scene remote,

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.