

fields, and who usually spoke of him, when out of his hearing, as "the old sinner." He too evidently cared nothing for them, and they detested him; and regarded the ruin which had overtaken him, and which their own recklessness and indifference to his welfare must have at least assisted to secure, with open satisfaction. "It was a'e comfort anyhow," they said, "that the blastit old sinner, after a' his near-goingness wi' them, was now but a dyvour bankrupt." Bad enough, certainly; and yet natural enough, and, in a sense, proper enough, too. The Christian divine would have urged these men to return their master good for evil. Cobbett, on the contrary, would have advised them to go out at nights a rick-burning. The better advice will to a certainty not be taken by ninety-nine out of every hundred of our bothy-men; for it is one of the grand evils of the system, that it removes its victims beyond the ennobling influences of religion; and, on the other hand, at least this much may be said for the worse counsel, that the system costs the country every year the price of a great many corn-ricks.

The three lads lived chiefly on brose, as the viand at all edible into which their oatmeal could be most readily converted; and never baked or made for themselves a dish of porridge or gruel, apparently to avoid trouble, and that they might be as little as possible in the hated bothy. I always lost sight of them in the evening; but towards midnight their talk frequently awoke me as they were going to bed; and I heard them tell of incidents that had befallen them at the neighboring farm-houses, or refer to blackguard bits of scandal which they had picked up. Sometimes a fourth voice mingled in the dialogue. It was that of a reckless poacher, who used to come in, always long after nightfall, and fling himself down on a lair of straw in a corner of the bothy; and usually ere day broke he was up and away. The grand enjoyment of the three farm-lads,—the enjoyment which seemed to counter-balance, with its concentrated delights, the comfortless monotony of weeks,—was a rustic ball, which took place once every month, and sometimes oftener, at a public-house in a neigh-