

quaintance with the old Scots poets, if not very profound, became at least so respectable, that not until many years after did I meet with an individual who knew them equally well.

The strange picturesque allegories of Douglas, and the terse sense and racy humor of Dunbar, delighted me much. As I had to con my way slowly amid the difficulties of a language which was no longer that spoken by my country folk, I felt as if I were creating the sense which I found: it came gradually out like some fossil of the rock, from which I had laboriously to chip away the enveloping matrix; and in hanging admiringly over it, I thought I perceived how it was that some of my old schoolfellows, who were prosecuting their education at college, were always insisting on the great superiority of the old Greek and Roman writers over the writers of our own country. I could not give them credit for much critical discernment: they were indifferent enough, some of them, to both verse and prose, and hardly knew in what poetry consisted; and yet I believed them to be true to their perceptions when they insisted on what they termed the high excellence of the ancients. With my old schoolfellows, I now said, the process of perusal, when reading an English work of classical standing, is so sudden, compared with the slowness with which they imagine or understand, that they slide over the surface of their author's numbers, or of his periods, without acquiring a due sense of what lies beneath; whereas, in perusing the works of a Greek or Latin author, they have just to do what I am doing in deciphering the "Palace of Honour," or the "Golden Terge,"—they have to proceed slowly, and to render the language of their author into the language of their own thinking. And so, losing scarce any of his meaning in consequence, and not reflecting on the process through which they have entered into it, they contrast the little which they gain from a hurried perusal of a good English book, with the much which they gain from the very leisurely perusal of a good Latin or Greek one; and term *the little* the poverty of modern writers, and *the much* the fertility of the ancients. Such was my theory, and it was at least not an uncharitable one to my acquaintance. I was,