

and tall gables. There was a world of well-dressed company that evening in Dumfries ; for the aristocracy of the adjacent country for twenty miles round had poured in to attend a county ball, and were fluttering in groupes along the sunny side of the street, gay as butterflies. On the other side, in the shade, a solitary individual paced slowly along the pavement. Of the hundreds who fluttered past, no one took notice of him ; no one seemed to recognise him. He was known to them all as the exciseman and poet, Robert Burns ; but he had offended the stately Toryism of the district by the freedom of his political creed ; and so, tainted by the plague of Liberalism, he lay under strict quarantine. He was shunned and neglected ; for it was with the *man* Burns that these his contemporaries had to deal. Let the reader contrast with this truly melancholy scene, the scene of his festival a fortnight since. Here are the speeches of the Earl of Eglington and of Sir John M'Neill, and here the toast of the Lord Justice-General. Let us just imagine these gentlemen, with all their high aristocratic notions about them, carried back half a century into the past, and dropped down, on the sad evening to which we refer, in the main street of Dumfries. Which side, does the reader think, would they have chosen to walk upon ? Would they have addressed the one solitary individual in the shade, or not rather joined themselves to the gay groupes in the sunshine who neglected and contemned him ? They find it an easy matter to deal with the phantom idea of Burns now : how would they have dealt with the man then ? How are they dealing with his poorer relatives ; or how with men of kindred genius, their contemporaries ? Alas ! a moment's glance at such matters is sufficient to show how very unreal a thing a commemorative feast may be. Reality, even in idea, becomes a sort of Ithuriel spear to test it by. The Burns' festival was but an idle show, at which players enacted their parts.