

ever written by any other poet. And as there is but little temptation to master a language, and that, too, a language which never was spoken, for the sake of a few poems, however meritorious, most men are content to take the fame of the Rowley writings on trust, or at least to determine by brief specimens that they are in reality the wonderful compositions which the critics of the last age pronounced them to be. And so Chatterton is now very much a bright name associated with a dark story. Further, of the story, little more survived in the public mind than would have furnished materials for an ordinary newspaper paragraph. Chatterton had not been very fortunate in his biographers; and it was but known, in consequence, that, living in an age not unfamiliar with literary forgery,—it is unnecessary to give instances within sight of the great Highland mountains,—he had fabricated a volume of old English poems greatly superior to any old English poems ever written, with the single exception of those of Chaucer; that, quitting his native place, where he had succeeded in earning not more than the modicum of honour which prophets ordinarily achieve for themselves when at home, he had gone to force his upward way among the wits of London; and that there, in utter destitution and neglect, he had miserably destroyed himself. Such was all that was generally known of Chatterton, even by men of reading. Professor Masson's singularly interesting and powerful biography fills up this sad outline as it was never filled up before; and shows how deep a tragedy that of the poor boy was, who, after achieving immortality, "perished in his pride," at about the age when lads who purpose pursuing the more laborious mechanical professions are preparing to enter on their apprenticeships. Further, without aught approaching to formal apology for the offences and shortcomings of the hapless lad, it shows us what a mere boy he was, in all except genius, at the time of his death. Sir Walter,