

POETRY.

HOW SWEET 'TIS TO RETURN.

BY SAMUEL JOYCE, ESQ.

How sweet 'tis to return,
Where once we're happy been.
The paler now life's lamp may burn.

From the Southern Literary Messenger.

JAMES FENIMORE COOPER, ESQ.

Until the close of the last century, American literature was of an extremely miscellaneous character, and sustained by no writers who were authors by profession.

Of the classes of writers abovementioned, the novelist was the slowest in his advances into public favor. The severe cast of character of that grave generation, which retained traces of the stern and severely moral tone of feeling derived from the early settlers of the colonies, presented powerful obstacles to the introduction of a species of literature, whose object was amusement, and which, in the opinion of the sober people of the age, was akin to the sorceries of the Moabites and Ammonites, and a temptation of the devil.

One or two unsuccessful imitations of "The Foresters," followed soon afterwards; but no novelist appeared until 1793, when Charles Brockden Brown published "Wieland," which noble composition gave the author a title to rank among the most popular writers of fiction of his time.

page betray the poet of nature, and man of genius. Brown was the pioneer in the wilds of American fiction; and like all who travel an untraced path, had many obstacles to encounter. The novelist of that period was looked upon as little better than an infidel; his work was seldom met with in the library of the learned, or the boudoir of the rich and refined; and a devout abhorrence for works of the imagination, was inculcated and considered a good part of morality.

The next novelist of importance was Mrs. Foster, who, inspired by the popularity of Wieland and its successors, wrote a lively novel, called "The Boarding School;" but only added another to a numerous species of English novels, adapted to the taste of the day. Its success, however, was limited. Shortly afterwards, she published "The Quetto," a fiction of the same class and degree of merit; but many of its incidents having actually happened, and several of the characters which were drawn with skill and truth, being prominent living individuals, it created a certain kind of artificial excitement, and was read by every body.

The fame of the Great Unknown, and the revolution in public sentiment in relation to fiction, at length drew many competitors into the field, both in Great Britain and the United States. The genius of Sir Walter Scott seemed to have enkindled a hundred minds. Among the numerous candidates for novelistic honors in America, the gentleman whose name has given title to this paper, was destined to stand forth the most distinguished. Mr. Cooper is a native of Burlington, in the state of New Jersey. He was educated at Yale College, and subsequently became a midshipman in the navy, in which situation he acquired that nautical knowledge to which his countrymen are indebted for the "Pilot," the "Red Rover," and the "Water Witch."

In 1823, Mr. Cooper sent forth his third work, "The Pioneer," the principal scenes of which are laid in the American wilderness. Taught by this time how to estimate their novelist, the American press received this production more favorably, but still held back the full meed of praise, until they could hear from the other side of the water.

It is not the object of the writer to discuss the merits of these novels, but to offer a brief notice of them and their author. The "Pilot," the scenes of which are laid on the coast of England, in the revolutionary war, and the hero of which, who

gives the title to the work, is John Paul Jones, was published in the year 1824, and forthwith became popular. The time embraced by the whole book, excepting the last chapter, is less than seventy-two hours. It is undoubtedly one of the best, as it certainly is the most finished, of Mr. Cooper's fictions. "Lionel Lincoln" soon followed "The Pilot," in 1825; and its popularity was unprecedented. The scenes of this romance are laid in Boston during its occupation by the British troops, at the beginning of the revolutionary struggle. It is second, in point of merit, to others by the same author, but yields to none of them in interest. It was this production that created in Boston and throughout New England, a popularity for Mr. Cooper's works, at one period so great, as to become among novel readers, almost a mania.

In 1826, Mr. Cooper sent out from his prolific pen, another annual;—for his appearance was now marked with the regularity of the seasons; and a new novel, yearly, from the "author of the Spy," as he was designated, had got to be as much a matter of course, as the annual message from the president. This, his sixth romance, is entitled "The Last of the Mohicans," and is assimilated, in the peculiarities of its principal scenes and characters, to "The Pioneers," both of which fictions may, with propriety, be denominated in contradiction to "Nautical,"—"Indian novels;" their prominent features being the portraiture of Indian manners and customs, the peculiarities of which are exhibited in the habits of certain aboriginal characters therein introduced. In painting Indian scenes of still life, or in delineating the warrior and hunter, the battle or the chase, our novelist, as he is the first who seized upon subjects so full of interest for the romancer, so is he alone and unrivalled in this branch of his art. The forest, ocean, and camp, constitute the legitimate empire of Mr. Cooper's genius. At his bidding the savage warrior, the fearless seaman, the gallant soldier, move, speak and act with wonderful reality. But in the streets of a city; in the green fields; in the parlor or in the bower, he is not so entirely at home; and the details of rural and domestic life, are apparently unsuited to the character of his genius. His mind is deeply imbued with love for the stern and the sublime; as a poet, he doubtless would have written very much like Campbell.

In 1827, Mr. Cooper published his seventh romance, entitled "The Prairie," a fiction of the same species of the Pioneers, and by judicious critics esteemed one of the best from his pen. The "author of the Spy" had now attained to that degree of popularity, when, at length, an author's productions are received unquestioned, read without criticism, and become a part of the current literature of the age. The words "By the author of the Spy," on the title page of a novel, was now sufficient for its introduction, unread, not only into the boudoir, but into the libraries of men of taste and learning. Having successfully overcome the rapid, quicksands and whirlpools which obstructed his onset, Mr. Cooper had now only to spread his sail, recline at ease in his bark, and wafted by the breezes of popular favor, glide peacefully over the placid sea of literary fame.

The popularity of the Prairie was unprecedented by any previous works from the same pen. At this period, the English language presented the remarkable feature of two of its writers, natives of different lands, engrossing the whole field of romance, controlling the public taste, and each founding at the same time, in opposite hemispheres, an immortal school of fiction. Scott opened the treasures of the highlands, and scattered their inexhaustible stores throughout Christendom; and by the power of his unaided genius, he has thrown a classic interest over the hills, glens, towers and lakes of his native country, as imperishable as the charm which the epic poets of Rome and Greece have thrown around their lands. Cooper unfolded the mysteries of the pathless wilderness, snatched its native lords from the oblivion into which they were sinking, and bade them live, before the eyes of the admiring world, in all the poetry and romance of their characters. The magic of his pen has invested the forest with an interest such as genius can alone create. He has so portrayed the character of a primitive people, who were men until the contact of civilization made them brutes, that, when they shall at length live only in the page of history, it is alone through the inspired pen of the novelist, that future ages will most delight to contemplate their character. Both Scott and Cooper have thrown an exaggerated poetic interest around the characters they most loved to draw; and the rude highlander of the Scottish hills, and the savage of the American wilds, are, perhaps, equally indebted to the imagination of the novelist for the peculiar charms with which they are invested, when exhibited to the reader through their seductive pages.—The novelty of the subjects and characters on which Sir Walter Scott exercised his pen, contributed essentially, not only to the popularity of his novels in England, but especially in America. Here, we knew but little or nothing of highlanders from observation; and our imaginations exaggerating what little knowledge we did possess through distorted and imported traditions, prepared us for the reception of romances (such as Scott's earlier novels,) professing to portray the more romantic features of their manners and habits. Aside from their intrinsic merit,

the novels of Cooper also, from causes similar to these, became universally popular in England. An Englishman who has never visited America, has peculiar ideas of that terra incognita, an American forest, and of its aboriginal inhabitants. His imagination invests both with a sort of oriental interest, of which an American cannot well conceive. This can be readily referred to that "distance which lends enchantment to the view," and that leads us, this side of the Atlantic, to view all connected with England through a singularly false medium; an illusion, which, by merely substituting the telescopic for the microscopic distance, it has been proven may easily be dispelled. Mr. Cooper, so far as the English public were concerned, had his work half done to his hands; and his pictures of Indian character and western life and adventure, were received in Great Britain with unbounded enthusiasm:

In 1828, the "Red Rover" made its appearance, and won for the author fresh laurels, both from his countrymen and Europeans. His works had not only reached Great Britain, but previous to this time had drawn the attention of Germany and France, into the languages of which nations they were translated, and received with a popularity rivalling that which they had met with in England and the United States. Perhaps no novel has been more extensively read by all classes of society, than this last mentioned production. The whole of this year, with the exception of a few weeks spent in England, was passed by Mr. Cooper in France, Belgium and Holland. The year 1829, which he also spent on the continent, was marked in his literary history by the publication of two works—"The Notes of a Travelling Bachelor," and the "Wept of the Wish-Ton-Wish." Neither of these productions materially increased his popularity as a writer. The first was not a fiction. Mr. Cooper had been so long treating his friends to an annual hamper of champagne, that they would not put up with healthy cider, though bearing the same brand. He had created and fostered a taste for fictitious compositions, and he could not complain. The young ladies pouted their pretty lips from vexation, and would not read it from sheer spite. The young gentlemen took it up cavalierly, and determined to read and abuse it out of revenge. The "Travelling Bachelor" was read nevertheless, with approbation by a large class of readers, whom his novels had reached. It proved to be a work displaying the finest powers of the novelist, and although of a different character from his former productions, well worthy to rank among them, and advance undisputed claims to a high place in the branch of literature to which it belongs. "The Wept of the Wish-Ton-Wish," an Indian tale, or novel, published soon afterwards in the same year, was far from obtaining the popularity of its predecessors. In 1830, Mr. Cooper omitted sending forth his annual fiction. This year, also, he passed on the continent, during which period, we believe, he was acting as our consul at Lyons. In 1831, he published the "Water Witch," a nautical novel.—It redeemed the doubtful success of "The Wept of the Wish-Ton-Wish," which, to pursue a figure before adopted, cast a brief shadow, as if from a passing cloud, upon the bright waters over which his bark had hitherto been prosperously careering. The apparent resemblance,—which, in treating similar themes could not be avoided, without too manifest artifice, between this work and the "Red Rover," caused some severe and not always just criticisms from the press, on its first appearance; but this did not affect its popularity, which eventually equalled, if it did not surpass, that acquired by the production with which it was compared. The Water Witch was not only dramatized and successfully performed on the American boards, but, also, many of the previous novels by the same author, received this testimony of popularity.

In 1832, Mr. Cooper was still residing in Europe, where he had been since 1828, touring through England, Belgium, Germany, France and Italy. As the fruit, no doubt, of a some-time sojourn in Venice, he gave to the world this year, his twelfth book and eleventh novel, "The Bravo of Venice." This was the first time Mr. Cooper had placed the scenes of his fictions in other than his native land. Up to this period he had been emphatically a native novelist. He had explored the empire of American fiction, before untrodden, and proved to the world that Europe was not alone the land of story. He had shown that ived walls, time-worn castles and gloomy dungeons, were not necessary to make a land a land of romance; that the war of the revolution rivalled, in romantic interest, the wars of the crusades; that the Indians warriors equally with the turbaned Saracen, was the theme of the romancer; and that heroes need not always to be clad in iron mail, nor heroines have only knightly lovers sighing at their feet, or breaking lances and heads to attest their devotion. Solely by his genius and industry, he had laid the foundation for a school of romance as original, as extensive, and destined to be as perpetual as that instituted in another land by the author of Waverley. In quitting a field where he reigned without a rival, to adventure on unfamiliar ground, evinced, at least, temerity; and, if it did not endanger the fame he had already won in many a tilt, it at least promised no adequate honors to one who had already plucked unfading laurels.—The "Bravo," however, attested on every

page, the legitimacy of its author's genius; the genius of Cooper pervaded the whole. There were two causes, however, which militated against its unmixed popularity in England and in America; although Italy, France and Germany, it was eminently successful. The English was sated with continental productions from English pens, in every possible shape. The Bravo was regarded as only another of this genus, although coming from a source which enforced its favorable reception. It is not, however, to be understood, that the Bravo was unpopular in England; viewed with some of its contemporaries, it was only comparatively so. Its reception was infinitely more flattering than that which usually attended the best continental novels of the same class. In the United States it not well received, although the cause just advanced, could not, in this country affect it. The objection, a somewhat ridiculous one, was, that it was a foreign work; and, many thought, with jealousy, that Mr. Cooper should have exhausted American subjects before he resorted to the hackneyed themes of Italian story. There may, perhaps, be some foundation in a wholesome national prejudice for these prejudices. They materially affected his popularity in the United States, although his fame was too firmly established to be sensibly moved by it. It has been accurately remarked by Sir Walter Scott, that the reputation of a novelist is neither gained nor lost by a single production.

In 1833, "The Heidenmauer" (heathen wall) or "The Benedictines," followed the Bravo. The scenes of this fiction are likewise laid in Europe. This work, also, had to contend with the prejudices above mentioned. It was moreover written with somewhat less vigor and beauty of style than characterized the former works by the same author. His spirit seemed to languish beneath a foreign sky, and labor and art to have succeeded the freshness of inspiration. A comparison of his two last works with the Prairie and Red Rover showed clearly that America was the empire, as well as the birthplace, of Cooper's genius.

The thirteenth novel of the "Author of the Spy," and his fourteenth work, published in 1834, is entitled "The Headsman of Berne." With the Water Witch, Mr. Cooper appears to have bid adieu to the American soil as a novelist, and to have left the field to the numerous aspirants for his fame, who now began to occupy the arena. The scenes of this novel are laid in Switzerland. Its appearance revived in a measure the waning popularity of its author in the United States, although his countrymen were not pleased that their most distinguished novelist should expatriate both himself and his novels. The Headsman is marked with all the beauties of Mr. Cooper's best and most popular compositions. We believe it was previous to the publication of this romance, that the author received the appointment of Charge d'Affaires for the United States at Paris. "The Monks," Mr. Cooper's fourteenth and last novel, followed the Headsman. It bore few traces of our author's manner, and was limited in its popularity.

In 1835, some political strictures appeared from the pen of Mr. Cooper, that were roughly handled by the American press. In 1836, two series of "Sketches of Switzerland, by an American," and in 1837, "England, by an American," and "Gleanings in Europe," were given to the public from the press of Carey & Lea, who have uniformly, we believe, been Mr. Cooper's publishers. These works, completing his nineteenth and last book, and being his thirty-eighth volume, produced in the space of nineteen years, bear testimony that the pen of the novelist has parted with no modicum of the strength and beauty of style, with which he has clothed his description of American scenery in the pages of the Spy, Prairie and Pioneers. Mr. Cooper has suppressed many portions of the original manuscript of the Sketches of Switzerland, for reasons which he has slightly touched upon in his preface. These volumes do not relate exclusively to Switzerland; France, Germany, Italy and Holland, are included in the observations of the writer. The first volume opens at Paris in 1828, and leaves the author at Milan. The second volume also begins at Paris, and the reflections of the writer embrace some of the countries abovementioned. We are particularly struck with the boldness and truth of Mr. Cooper's caustic remarks in his volumes on England, in relation to Americans at home and abroad. He has herein shown himself an able, impartial and fearless censor of the foibles and faults of his countrymen. These last works have been favorably received, although the bold attitude the writer has assumed, has elicited severe and often merited criticism. Mr. Cooper is now in his fiftieth year; his figure rather above the usual height, robust, and slightly inclined to portliness. His forehead is massive, and of an intellectual shape, and his eyes lively and expressive, denoting a thinking man and a close observer. His appearance is commanding. His manners are perhaps somewhat reserved, but his address is courteous and pleasing. He is at present a resident of New York, and will doubtless yield to the renewed inspiration of the native American muse, and enter himself for many succeeding years around our hearts; for we are reluctant to believe, that he has yet filled up the measure of his country's honor.