

**THE LAY OF THE
SCOTTISH FIDDLE: A
POEM IN FIVE CANTOS**

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The lay of the Scottish fiddle: a poem in five cantos by James Kirke Paulding

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JAMES KIRKE PAULDING

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L A Y
OF THE
SCOTTISH FIDDLE.
A POEM.
IN FIVE CANTOS.

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BY W—— S——, Esq.

By James M. Wilson
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TO THE
MEMBERS OF THE
ASSOCIATION

PREFACE

OF

THE ENGLISH EDITOR.

AN eminent female writer, whose genius does honour not only to her sex but to the human race, has observed in her admirable work on Germany, lately published, that conversation in England, is confined to politics and business: "Business, the parliament, the administration fill all heads; and political interests are the principal objects of their meditations." vol. i. p. 221. Without stopping at present to controvert an error so injurious to the taste of our country, and derogatory to the convivial friendly meetings in England, where, when suspicious of no critic, the heart is light, and the soul flows without restraint or awe; or to contest with her the truth of her assertion of the superiority

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of the French in conversation, I am inclined to adapt her remark to American literature. Hitherto the writings of the Americans, with a few exceptions, have been upon political, commercial, and similar grave and important topics; but of works of taste and imagination the Old World has as yet received no accession from the New. It should seem that the progress of literary genius is concurrent with their progress as a nation: they have formed the base of their column, they have perhaps raised the shaft of it, but the capital is wanting: in the *Belles Lettres*, and particularly Poetry, they are still behind-hand. Before the present we have seen no work which entitles America to boast of a poet; but when politics and commerce shall cease to engross the minds of her inhabitants, there can be no doubt that some of her sons will share that divine inspiration, which, in the other quarters of the world, has given celebrity to so many names. That the seeds of poetical genius have been for some time floating in the American atmosphere, is proved even by efforts that have been unsuccessful; and now the following

Poem will show that America possesses a Poet who has but to respect himself, and to make a judicious choice of subjects, to take a station among the Bards at the summit of Parnassus.

The intrinsic and independent beauties of the poem almost make it a pity that the author should have descended to burlesque and parody. The pen from which these have flowed would have attained, and will attain, immortal honour, by turning to subjects worthy of immortality; by disdain- ing to catch at a laugh; and by determining not to give up to party, or even to vindictive patriotism, a soul meant for mankind.

It will be seen that the "Lay of the Scottish Fiddle" is intended to be in general a parody of Scott's style; but it will also strike the reader, that the Author frequently loses sight of his intention, and is borne away by the native powers of his own genius into original flights worthy of the great poet himself, whose style he purposes to make subservient to a burlesque romance, in which

he means to raise a laugh at the military and naval commanders who are engaged to oppose the pretensions of his country, as well as at some of his own countrymen, particularly the inhabitants of New England. He is perhaps more successful than any other writer, who has thought proper to imitate or to parody the style of the poet of Melrose; but it is where he soars beyond the sphere of imitation that he proves himself to be a poet.

It has pleased the Author, humorously, and perhaps in an open enemy not unfairly, to compose a burlesque poem, in which he treats the war as predatory, our officers as border chieftains, and the military operations, which bear hard upon his countrymen, as the acts of freebooters and uncivilized warfare. To answer these poetical liberties seriously, would be to take them in a serious light. The reply to the causes of the unhappy and unnatural war between Great Britain and America, and the manner of waging it, is in abler hands than that which holds the pen to write this Preface; nor do the honour

and character of our commanders on the American station require its aid.

That pure romantic burlesque, in which an adherence to fact is not expected, forms the spirit of the story, and of the descriptions of the following poem, is very evident, from the Author's own avowal in a humorous note, where he indulges his hostile imagination in creating a ridiculous feature for the face of one of his knights: "I cannot," he states, "positively say he had a red nose, but there are several reasons to suppose so. Dugdale affirms, &c." In these points the Author is truly Hudibrastic, and the English reader, who will consider him only as a poet, will make every allowance for the fiction of a writer whose country is at war with that to which he refers, and from whose commanders it may have received some rough treatment. For myself, I will be bound to say, from my confidence in the British spirit on sea and land, that no operation of a British commander was ever the result of dishonourable motives. But this is not the place to enter into a defence of Bri-