

**THREE HOUSEHOLD POETS: VIZ.-  
MILTON, COWPER, BURNS, WITH  
AN INTRODUCTION ON POETRY  
AND SONG**

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Three Household Poets: Viz.-Milton, Cowper, Burns, with an Introduction on Poetry and Song  
by John Tomlinson

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**JOHN TOMLINSON**

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BY

JOHN TOMLINSON.



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1869.

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## P R E F A C E.

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DURING the year 1849, a skeleton of all these papers, except the Conversation on Milton, appeared in the *Mirror Magazine*. Twenty years have passed away, and the question arises, Supposing the sketches were ever worth printing, have they any signification now? The times are changed, for society would now laugh at a man who embodied poetry as the chief purpose of life. Now scarcely anything is read, except the newspaper, the sensational novel, or some highly-coloured article in a favourite magazine. Standard authors, and books of poetry in particular, lie neglected on the shelves. It is so—the spirit of the age has changed. Half a century ago, and later, we could scarcely travel inside a stagecoach, or on the deck of a steamboat, without noticing that our companion was engrossed with a well-thumbed pocket edition of his favourite bard. Now, people of any social pre-

tensions would blush with shame to be publicly caught enjoying anything so vulgar as an old book of poems. Since young ladies scorn to wear a bonnet which had been the rage six weeks ago, (for there is a psychological history in dress), and man's adherence to any public leader may not be calculated upon for three months in succession, so the rage for literary novelty engenders hot-bed productions, pandering to the ephemeral taste of the day.

There is a cynical air in the reader's face while he delivers his bile thus : " True poetry is always nectar to a healthy taste, or rather, like good wine, age does but enhance its value ; but prosing about poetry—Pah ! [spitting out]—that is a very different beverage." Be charitable and reasonable, sir ; the human race are not all like yourself, of full literary stature. During the first twenty years of my life, that season when we live most upon imagination, I could not have enjoyed Homer's *Iliad*, and would have felt much weariness in being obliged to read ten consecutive pages of the *Æneid* ; but I could heartily relish my monthly *Blackwood*—the glorious *Blackwood* of old Christopher North !—and even appreciate Homer or Virgil through those admirable paraphrases on different translators. I have known men in the meridian of life who could never



read a hundred lines of standard verse except as a task; and yet, on all practical matters, they would exhibit an exquisite sensibility and refined taste, showing clearly that they had the stuff in them out of which poets are made. "Poets are born, not made," says the old adage, and it may be that no amount of discipline can give *some men* a true appreciation of poetry; but, reader, never trust these latter persons with either your honour or your money, at least, not without requiring a just bond for the due performance of ordinary contracts.

DONCASTER, *June 1869.*



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