

afore. We auld folk dinna ken whether maist to blame or praise them; but they keep the young people laughing frae the a'e nuik o' the shire till the ither."

"But how," I inquired, "have the better clergy rendered themselves obnoxious to Burns? The laws he has violated, if I rightly understand you, are indeed severe, and somewhat questionable in their tendencies; and even good men often press them too far."

"And in the case of Robert," said the old man, "our clergy have been strict to the very letter. They're gude men, an' faithfu' ministers; but ane o' them at least, an' he a leader, has a harsh, ill temper, an' mistakes sometimes the corruption o' the auld man in him for the proper zeal o' the new ane. Nor is there ony o' the ithers wha kent what they had to deal wi' when Robert cam' afore them. They saw but a proud, thrawart ploughman, that stood uncow'ring under the glunsh o' a haill session; and so they opened on him the artillery o' the kirk, to bear down his pride. Wha could hae tauld them that they were but frushing their straw an' rotten wood against the iron scales o' Leviathan? An' now that they hae dune their maist, the record o' Robert's mishanter is lying in whity-brown ink yonder, in a page o' the session-buik; while the ballads hae sunk deep, deep intil the very mind o' the country, and may live there for hunders and hunders o' years."

"You seem to contrast, in this business," I said, "our better with what you must deem our inferior clergy. You mean, do you not, the higher and lower parties in our church? How are they getting on now?"

"Never worse," replied the old man; "an' oh, it's surely ill when the ministers o' peace become the very leaders o' contention! But let the blame rest in the right place."