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The title of this volume is itself a passport to the people of North-Western Durham. Often and well has the praises of the Derwent Valley been sung.

Dr Carr, L.L.D., Mr Lax, of Shotley Bridge, and lastly, Mr Alexander Harraes, having each tuned their harps with no feeble hand. The author of the *Widow's Tale* is a man of a most practical encouragement from all who rejoice to assist men who labour to improve upon their fellows the lofty aims and end of human life. Every page teems with elevating sentiment, faultlessly expressed. Some 150 pages of the *Widow's Tale* are immediately upon the subject of fine-tuned paper, cloth gilt, is devoted to an original poem entitled, "The Derwent Valley. Local poets, as a rule, continue to find an outlet to their musings before finally venturing on the slippery path deviated from this common method, and his book is all the more valuable on that account. The poem in question is in three cantos, the first dedicated to his mother, the second to Mr Lax, and the third to his wife.

went, beginning at Blanchland and traversing the stream to within a short distance of its junction

with the Type. The district is rich in history and legendary lore, and although the ground has been already trodden by other bards, it is due to Mr. Barras to say that he has re-touched the pictures with an artistic hand. Poets are pretty safe ground in nature, and their word painting is at all times coloured with lines which savour of lonely glens and forest glades. Mr. Alexander Barras does even beyond this feature of poetic latitude. The murmuring voice of the Derwent awakens day-dreams of long ago, and yielding to the longings of

the spirit within, the poet appeals to the silent wastes that stretch far westward from the winding stream.

O, wild green hills! rehearse to me the history
Of that you beheld in days of yore;
Of all the deeds of love and mystery
That you have gazed in placid silence o'er;
Of all the woes our mortal fathers bore,
Ere they had come to slumber from the gale;
What was the impulse that impelled them on?
How did they find a new woman weeping vain?
Alas! ye silent hills! alas! thou silent vale!
No voice comes from out the shades of the buried
past, but nothing daunted, the poet proceeds to do
exactly what Mahomet is credited with doing when
the stubborn mountains refused to move from their
foundation. A mid-richly stored with historic
and legendary lore conduce to make the bard a

very charming fellow traveller indeed. He leads his companion—for such in fact the reader who is

desires of enjoying to the full the pleasure which the reading of this excellent poem is calculated to impart must suppose himself to be—in fancy to the days of old—the mental horizon was shrouded in thick darkness, the rude dwellers on the Desert worshipping stocks and stones. Musing on this epoch of our history, the poet declares with some emphasis that—

“Man shall not grope in gloom for evermore :
The Wisdom-hunt that framed the thinking
mind”
Shall lead him up, through all the vague before
From peak to peak with broader truth beamed
Till mousting which commands the whole
behind—

The fable-faiths, the long-discarded lies, —
As we gaze back and deem our fathers blind,

The first canto ends with the following beautiful stanza :—

"O, Spring eternal, bless her shades
With never-fading bloom ;
For ever be her wild arades

Prolife of perfume,
 Bright be her groves with human loves
 By no privation tried ;
 And all of worth that glads the earth
 Adorn the Derwent-side."

The second canto opens with the opening morn,
 the poet dealing in felicitous terms with the
 scenery and associations in the neighbourhood of
 Shottley Bridge, the day again closing before the
 travellers have passed the secluded village of
 Ebbw-ster—so rich is that particular part of the

Derwent in treasures upon which the contemplated minds desires to dwell. Bidding his

"— if to-morrow spreads congenial sky,
 As bright a bliss awaits thy heart and mine,
 And so good night—supernal dreams be thine;
 Thus feeds the heart on hope from day to day :
 Another morn for us may never shine,
 And yet the petty plans of life we lay
 As though its waning light would never burn
 away.
 In the third and concluding canto the travellers
 traverse the lower reaches of the Derwent, parting

company between Aixwell Park and Swalwell, their entertaining guide very truthfully remarking:—

For busy life to banish all the bright
Of Deswert from your heart;
Good night, my friend, good night!"

In addition to the exquisite poem from which the volume takes its name, there are a number of what the author calls "minor poems." The themes chosen are various, and they are without exception of a very meritorious character; especially is this true of those pieces in which the poet gives his muse the rein and rides his pegasus in the narrative form. "The children of the

"The Baroque Form: The entrance of the street" is a good example of Mr Barrass' power in this walk of poetry. In descriptive pieces he is

lively and forcible; but in dialogue he exerts himself. We do not think the appellation "minor poems" is a very happy one, for although in those shorter pieces there is not the same scope for flights of poetical fancy to which the canto gives full power, the so-called minor poems possess a charm peculiarly their own. The piece entitled "Our Quiet Hours" is a very good illustration of this:—

"Our quiet hours have power at their command
To lift the thick black veil of mystery,
And lead us to the borders of that sea,

Whose silent waters lave our time-leased land,
Where we behold our loved ones as they stand
Smiling and radiant on the farther shore.

Watching our weary tugging at the oar,
And waving to us with immortal hand,
And as we gaze and ponder, lo! a band
Of holy singers its wrapt music flings
Around us, till we seem to understand
The import of our being, and that things
Beyond the grave are not all vain imaginings."

The piece, "Never say Die," has the meritorious
ring of the sterling metal. Subjoined is the last
stanza:—

"Never say die, but bostir thee in earnest,

There lies before thee a goal to be won ;
And beaming around wheresoever thou turnest,
Are smiles of affection to welcome thee on.

But what if these pass through the world disregarded?
 'Tis when we have done and our weapons laid by;
 That all honest toil shall be justly rewarded—
 O, never say die, brother, never say die!"

In the foregoing piece the poet strikes a chord which, rightly understood, cannot do other than elevate and cheer. The poem, entitled "Work," partakes of the same ennobling sentiment. It contains nine stanzas, two of which we give below:—

First knew primeval man ;
Firm in the path of duty held,

His fateful life began ;
And ere his first day's sun was set,
Did heaven the mandate give :
Prepare to live by toil and sweat,
By labour must thou live.

* * *

" The small, indeed, that man can do,
Yet on the stubborn soil,
The delvers yet unborn may view
The traces of thy toil ;
And thus the imprints of thy feet,
Max observed in this

When they would fain't beneath the heat
And burden of the day,

"Baby mine," "Your ain firsides," "The old Churchyard," and many other pieces of equal merit well deserve special notice; but we have quoted sufficient to show that this sweet singer well deserves a niche in popular favour. The last piece in the volume is a beautiful little poem, albeit that it partakes a shade of the melancholy element. We quote two stanzas:—

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[illegible]