The Glasgow Herald.

116TH YEAR.—No. 77. WITH SUPPLEMENT. THURSDAY, MARCH 31, 1898. TWELVE PAGES. PRICE ONE PENNY.

channel. Scott himself has told us in his usual emphatic manner how he found all the literary world of Edinburgh talking, about the summer of 1793 or 1794, of the extraordinary ballad which the celebrated Mrs Barbauld had thrilled her Scottish hosts by reciting in the translation of William Taylor of Norwich. "The enthusiastic description given of Bürger's ballad, and the broken account of the story, of which only two lines were recollected," inspired Scott with a desire to see the original. The two lines, of course, were those which, as adapted by Scott, every poetical boy has since declaimed with delight—

"Tramp! tramp! along the land they rode,
Splash! splash! along the sea."

Bürger's works were not very easy to get in Edinburgh, but Scott finally obtained them, and they had scarcely been in his possession for a day before he was fired with the fever of translation. "I well recollect," says Scott, "that I began my task after supper and finished it about daybreak the next morning, by which time the ideas which the task had a tendency to summon up were rather of an uncomfortable character." Sir Alexander Wood, who was one of the first to hear the new translation, has preserved a lively specimen of these ideas. "He read it over to me," says Wood, "in a very slow and solemn tone, and . . . continued to look at the fire silent and musing for some minutes, until he at length broke out with 'I wish to Heaven I could get a skull and two cross-bones.'" So the two lads went off to John Bell, the surgeon, who gave Scott a choice amongst his numerous specimens. Many years after Wood's recollection of the incident was revived by his finding the skull and cross-bones prominent in Scott's dressing-room at Abbotsford.

A little spark, as the proverb tells us, can kindle a great fire. Bürger's ballad must certainly be given the credit of having set light to more than one beacon destined to illumine a considerable tract of English poetical literature. We have seen how it spurred on Scott to use his pen; the translation of "Lenore" first allowed him to taste the "dear delight" of seeing himself in print, and encouraged him to exploit that semi-mystical vein which revealed his powers to the world in the "Lay of the Last Minstrel," and so taught him that his real vocation did not lie in Parliament House. Meantime, the weird and romantic influence of "Lenore" was making itself equally felt in South Britain. We do not know that anybody has explained how it was that the ballad, which was published in 1775, took nearly twenty years to make its way to England. When it did arrive, however, it came just at the psychological moment. Poetry in England had fallen to a very low ebb since the death of Gray and Goldsmith. Its state about 1790 is neatly summed up in Parson's dog-Latin verses—

"Poetis nos laetamur tribus,
Pye, Petro Pindar, parvo Pybus;
Si ulterius tre pergis,
Adde his Sir James Bland Burges."

The tuneful but somewhat flat sonnets of Bowles and the realistic iambics of Crabbe were the only things that rose above the level indicated by this quartette. Burns was hardly known across the Border. Thus when Bürger's singular blend of romance and *diablerie* arrived in England, it set many minds at work. Seven or eight translations of "Lenore" made their appearance within a few months. Charles Lamb wrote of one of them to Coleridge, "Have you read the Ballad called 'Leonora,' in the second number of the *Monthly Magazine*? If you have!!!" Luckily Coleridge had, and it is not difficult to trace the consequences in "Kubla Khan" and "The Ancient Mariner." Monk Lewis also read "Lenore," and though he is so totally forgotten to-day Byron's journal is enough to record the influence that "Mat" once had on English literary taste. Bürger, in fact, was the sensation of the moment, and that at a time when our poetry was preparing for a new outburst. His ballads set men asking where the inspiration came from, and so Percy's "Reliques" were again brought into vogue, with great effect upon the Age of Wordsworth. Bürger himself, it appears, would not have been overjoyed at his English popularity, even if he had not died just before it set in. He was much troubled to see that his early and hasty ballad had a vogue in Germany that his later and more careful work never attained. But it is as the poet of "Lenore" that he is still remembered, and any British subscriptions to his memorial are not likely to be influenced by his "Song of Songs," or even by his version of "Macbeth."

In the midst of the rumours of wars it is agreeable to have some excuse for looking upon the Continent with non-political eyes for a moment. The proposal to erect a memorial of the German poet Bürger in his native village ought to find many sympathisers and even some subscribers in Great Britain. Perhaps there are not many of us who can profess to have read in the original the famous ballads that made Gottfried August Bürger the most popular German poet of the last third of the eighteenth century. It is to be feared that even the sumptuous translations made of them by that sweet singer, the Honourable Mr Spencer, and adorned with pictures by the fair but frail Lady Di Beauclerk, whom Boswell vainly championed in the presence of Dr Johnson, has long been dispersed for waste paper. But the poet of "Lenore" has a claim upon all English readers stronger than any possessed by his own work, in that he directly inspired the first published work of Walter Scott. In doing so, indeed, Bürger but exercised a portion of the great influence that he had upon English poetry just a hundred years ago. But it was a very important portion. No doubt Scott could never have settled down into a mere Advocate. Had Bürger never existed, we should still have had a "Lady of the Lake" and a "Rob Roy" one imagines. The river might have taken somewhat different windings at its rise, but it would all the same have found its natural course in due time. Still that is no reason for denying honour to the first man who turned it into its appointed