

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENCE.

BIOGRAPHICAL REMARKS.

BURNS'S LETTER-WRITING TO WOMEN.

READERS who refer to our Biography will be reminded that, on the authority of the shrewdest and most accomplished critics of the time, Burns's gift of speech was equal—in the opinion of many superior—to his gift of poetry. In argument or in conversation he was alike fascinating and instructive, and in the peculiar gift of imaginative storytelling, he was altogether unrivalled. Had the conversation, or most eloquent colloquial oratory, with which he thus entertained and delighted society for the time, been recorded or even epitomised, like Coleridge's or Johnson's, the world might now have been in possession of an invaluable legacy of wisdom, or of fiction, as worthy of preservation in many respects as the memorabilia of Socrates by Xenophon, or the eloquent fabrications of Plato. But such speech never can be recorded. It belongs essentially to the lips and air; and, when once delivered, will brook no tarrying, but passes on with the atmosphere, enriching its echoes by reverberation only, never to return. All, therefore, that can be said to remain of the Prose Works of Robert Burns, is to be found in his Epistolary Correspondence; on which, fortunately for the world, he bestowed both enthusiasm and care, and of which, although much has been lost or destroyed, much yet survives to attest sufficiently the variety and beauty of the whole.

The value and prospective interest of this correspondence seems to have been suggested to him by friends; for towards the close of his life he had already commenced a revision of all the rough-draft letters in his own hands, and had even proceeded to some length in their transcription in a volume prepared expressly for their preservation. This work, we presume, was delayed by sickness, and finally interrupted by death. All we know, therefore, of this most extraordinary outpouring of epistolary eloquence has been from the gradually increasing accumulation of originals, where they have been scattered by friendship or by chance over the world. Not a few, we believe, remain yet to be discovered, and of those which are already known to the public the most careful study and redistribution is required, to illustrate the writer's character and elucidate their own perfection.

The arrangement of this rich and varied material in the mere order of time, although it has advantages in a statistical point of view, is most unsatisfactory in other respects. To every correspondent and to every subject, as well as to every epoch and day of his life, these letters have an especial and instructive relation of their own, which is absolutely lost, or immensely impaired, by the intrusion of other dates, interests, or individuals on a sphere with which they have no such relation. The con-

tinuity of the writer's thoughts and sentiments is thus broken, and his idea of the individual addressed is hopelessly entangled with that of others, with whom for the moment he has no concern, and of whom we do not care to hear or think whilst he is earnestly or affectionately addressing another in our presence. Subjects, also, that should appear in their entirety to be understood with advantage, or understood at all, are thus disintegrated or marred; and finally, which is most to be lamented, the grand characteristic aspects of the man's own intellectual or moral nature are completely obliterated, a confused, although delightful medley of thought and speech being all that remains—like a landscape seen through a continual shower or waterfall of indiscriminate commingled radiance—hills, woods, valley-tracts, and rivers swimming all together in perpetual maze before us. To remedy these defects of mere chronological arrangement, some new principle of classification was desirable; some method of presenting the whole in such groups or masses as should present the man himself most clearly in distinguishable characteristic phases, and preserve at the same time, as far as possible, the chronological order also. With this double object in view, we have arranged the whole, as already intimated, under four distinct but by no means opposing heads, each having some natural and instructive affinity to the other; whilst the various contents of each have in like manner been subdivided and arranged independently, yet harmoniously: all the letters, for example, addressed to any one person being grouped together as much in consecutive order of their own dates as possible, that the extent and character of correspondence with the individual may be ascertained at a glance, and the relation of that individual, as a correspondent at least, to the writer's whole life, in time or in importance, determined accordingly.

In such arrangement of our Author's Correspondence as was thus suggested, we had very little hesitation as to which particular portion should have bulk and precedence of its own; and in assigning that precedence exclusively to his epistolary correspondence with women, much more than mere deference to their sex was implied. There is, indeed, a considerable number of letters addressed to persons of the other sex—sometimes of rank, sometimes of influence—that have manifestly been

written with the utmost care, and on topics of the highest special importance, which might also have been admitted on such grounds in this department; but as some of these relate to literary subjects, and others are almost isolated in their individual references, we felt as if it would be a sort of intrusion on this peculiar region to allow them to appear. Whatever else of special interest these may have in the way of careful composition or peculiar theme, they lack the special and peculiar tone which distinguished every epistolary communication addressed by him to women; and would only distract the attention of the reader from the strange and interesting study of so wonderful a nature in correspondence more immediately with them. In writing to men (with most of whom naturally he might be on more familiar relations), he was whatever the theme suggested, and often more; but the variety of the topics necessarily arising in course of such correspondence with them, although it did not alter, to a certain extent obscured the moral aspect of the writer himself. He was the same in all, but not so distinctly seen through the multiplicity of topics. His correspondence with persons of his own sex, therefore, or with the world at large, required considerably more analysis and subdivision to make it entirely appreciable. What was purely literary must be relegated to the region of literature; what was general or indifferent, or even special and ceremonious, but on trivial or on strictly business subjects, might be grouped together, and allowed to illustrate itself; what was chiefly or altogether domestic should have a sacred column of its own, however brief or humble: and so, it seemed most advantageous to arrange it all.

In writing to women, on the other hand (with whom he was necessarily to some extent on ceremony), whatever variety of subject might occur, he was always and conspicuously the same—man proper, in his highest intellectual attitudes. No theme whatever could come amiss to him in their presence, or was ever treated otherwise than with propriety, originality, elegance, and ease. Religion, morality, philosophy, the highest literature; friendship, love, life, death, courtship, marriage, grief, or joy; gloves, ribbons, fashions, travels, politics, theatres; music, versification, criticism, printing, penmanship itself, and poetry—are all themes of

deferential solicitude, or of fascinating talk, before them; whilst the sentiment, the tone, and very diction of his letters corresponds. In the course of this wonderful special epistolary authorship, we have every phase of masculine regard by turns—courtly independence, romantic gratitude, respectful devotion, chivalrous consideration; gallantry, railing, obeisance—nay, absolute prostration; imperious passion, and occasionally wrath itself—from a man like him, not always unacceptable; with a profusion of complimentary homage interwoven or implied, the manliest and sincerest ever offered for womanly recognition or acceptance. On this correspondence, to whomsoever addressed, we have the best authority for believing also that the writer bestowed the utmost care and expended his utmost brilliancy. Every letter might not be formally prepared (we have his own express declaration that only one letter to Mrs. Dunlop was transcribed; in which, however, we are much inclined to believe his memory deceived him), but every letter certainly was studied; and some of the most important, on difficult or painful topics, were probably revised, if not re-written, before being despatched to their destinations. He revels in them all with the grace of freedom, with the licence of decorum, with the ease of absolute self-control, and with the fascination of conspicuous idolatry in presence of these privileged divinities—who certainly, on their part, were far from being either averse or insensible to his worship. Such correspondence, therefore, for a thousand reasons, had prominent claims to precedence as special; with this additional recommendation, that it extends, in one form or another, throughout the Author's entire literary life—from the earliest dawn of love and poetry in his bosom, to the last sad hours of sorrow and decay; and is the best unbroken, many-sided, varied mirror of the man's personal existence extant.

Besides all which, in a literary point of view, there is much also of the highest personal interest pervading the whole of this special correspondence with women. The confidence he reposes in them, and the conscious assurance of their sympathetic interest in him and in his most intimate concerns, are remarkable features throughout. The whole truth in every case he does not divulge to them all, and was not expected to communicate perhaps

even to the most matronly or confidential among them; but the delicate boldness with which he makes many an avowal at which most ordinary letter-writers so highly privileged would either stumble and fall, or outrage with senseless impertinence the taste and good-nature of their correspondents, bespeaks the innate sense of propriety that was one of his highest characteristics, and the extent of honourable reliance he could exercise on the sympathy and admiration of the best and most accomplished of their sex. In the course of such revelations, also, we have numerous individual topics of health, of fortune, of domestic satisfactions or domestic trials, of the difficulties and triumphs of authorship, of social relations and of personal feelings, and of the general onward progress of his life and literary labours, all incidentally introduced, and slightly or more seriously, sometimes impatiently, discussed, after such a peculiar fashion as would only be attended to, or cared for, by women; and which, from this very fact, may be accepted as indicating the purer and higher action of his soul, at least in its meditative moods, when called on to discourse, in loving freedom, on such subjects, with listeners of unquestionable purity: which thus accumulated and examined, and impartially weighed, afford perhaps as true an average revelation also of his moral or religious state, as could be hoped for through any other sort of medium; whilst those letters of a peculiarly ardent or even questionable character, indited without consideration of consequences, and without reserve, during the same period, touching on whatever topic might be most conducive to his own object at the moment, unfold such an extraordinary underlying depth of passionate existence as to constitute the man himself, with all that appertained to him in thought or life, a theme of astonishment and wonder.

Minuter treatment in detail is here, perhaps, unnecessary; but it may be remarked, that the correspondence with Mrs. Dunlop—the realest, the most important, and dignified of its kind; and the selected correspondence with 'Clarinda'—approaching more nearly to the region of purely fictitious epistolary work than anything absolutely real ever did, are doubtless in many ways the most conspicuous portions of the whole. But the rest have a peculiar although subordinate interest of their own.

We place foremost, however, as in point of time and therefore of inexperience they precede the rest, a short series of formal letters addressed to some now only half-recognisable correspondent; whose ideas on the tender topic the writer seems to have been anxious to educate after a most serious, and, as he no doubt at the time believed, most exemplary fashion. The fair one thus solemnly approached was presumably Ellison Begbie—a sweet, unaffected girl then domiciled in the neighbourhood of Lochlea, and for whom the Poet long after entertained undoubtedly a genuine and devout affection. But the letters themselves, in which assurance of this regard was so unsuccessfully attempted to be conveyed, can hardly, we should think, at this date be read, even by the most inexperienced lover, with gravity. How laughable, in a few years after, would the whole affair seem to be to the half-awakened writer himself!

Under same head of early, perhaps rather elaborate, epistolary efforts, but on the topic of religion, a most valuable collection of letters never published has also by some untoward accident been now irretrievably lost. The particulars of this misfortune will be detailed hereafter in our Appendix.* In the meantime, we can but deplore, whilst we thus incidentally announce it as one of the greatest losses of its kind, both to his religious reputation and for the satisfaction of the world, that could well be imagined. The correspondence with Mrs. Dunlop, which dates from the commencement of his authorship and continues till the very close of his life, was reciprocated and sustained by that admirable woman, it may be said without interruption; but was obtained from her for publication, on the express condition only, that her own letters to the Poet should be surrendered to herself again in exchange for his. The letters to ‘Clarinda’ likewise date from a very early period in his authorship, and continue, with some characteristic passionate interruptions, till near the end of his career. By their fervid eloquence, as well as by their peculiar and in some respects their questionable character in the circumstances, these letters have attained a wide celebrity; although it would have been better, perhaps, had most of them remained unknown. They may be said to have been

anonymous, having only a fictitious signature, although undoubtedly authentic, and were manifestly never intended to be seen by any one but the person to whom they were addressed. But their piecemeal publication rendered concealment ultimately impossible; and it was therefore better upon the whole, that they should be known and judged of entire as they were, than condemned on conjecture as being more reprehensible than they are.* It is something astonishing, however, to reflect that two such series of letters should have been proceeding together during such a number of years, as those to Mrs. Dunlop and the others to ‘Clarinda,’ each to the respective correspondent perfect in their way, yet with such vast dissimilarity of tone and tendency. That another series, so bright, natural, half-passionate and beautiful, as the letters to Miss Chalmers, should have been interwoven in point of time with the others, or at least running side by side with them both so long; whilst not a single word in any of them seems to be misplaced, nor a topic misapplied; is perhaps not less astonishing—numerous special letters to individual indifferent, or rival parties, in the meantime, being all equally appropriate, characteristic, and perfect in their way.

The letters to Mrs. Walter Riddel, which date all from and after the year 1792—the latest epoch of his life—as they embody an extravagant friendship and relate to a distressing feud, and are throughout characterised by the greatest brilliancy and point, have a corresponding attractive interest, although comparatively few in number. The published collection of letters to this lady, however, we may mention, has hitherto been by no means complete—some of the most perfect being as yet publicly unknown. Our own best endeavours, we rejoice to say, have been to some extent successful in obtaining access to these interesting documents, several of which will now be added, in their place, to the already existing collection. The utmost we can do with respect to others, is to present fragments of those which are still beyond our reach; and which we now refer to thus prominently in the hope that the fortunate possessors of the originals, wherever they exist, may be induced hereafter, perhaps, to communicate them to the public.

* Ronalds of Bennals—Mrs. Reid: Original Reminiscences.

* See Authorised Edition of entire Correspondence.

CORRESPONDENCE.

(1.)

To Miss E.

[Supposed by Mr. Chambers to have been Ellison Begbie. Date of entire series, *Lochlea*, 1780-81. Letters first published by Currie, afterwards omitted.]

I VERILY believe, my dear E., that the pure, genuine feelings of love are as rare in the world as the pure, genuine principles of virtue and piety. This I hope will account for the uncommon style of all my letters to you. By uncommon, I mean their being written in such a serious manner, which to tell you the truth, has made me often afraid lest you should take me for some zealous bigot, who conversed with his mistress as he would converse with his minister. I don't know how it is, my dear, for though, except your company, there is nothing on earth gives me so much pleasure as writing to you, yet it never gives me those giddy raptures so much talked of among lovers. I have often thought that if a well-grounded affection be not really a part of virtue, 'tis something extremely akin to it. Whenever the thought of my E. warms my heart, every feeling of humanity, every principle of generosity kindles in my breast. It extinguishes every dirty spark of malice and envy which are but too apt to infest me. I grasp every creature in the arms of universal benevolence, and equally participate in the pleasures of the happy, and sympathize with the miseries of the unfortunate. I assure you, my dear, I often look up to the Divine Disposer of events with an eye of gratitude for the blessing which I hope he intends to bestow on me in bestowing you. I sincerely wish that he may bless my endeavours to make your life as comfortable and happy as possible, both in sweetening the rougher parts of my natural temper, and bettering the unkindly circumstances of my fortune. This, my dear, is a passion, at least in my view, worthy of a man, and I will add worthy of a Christian. The sordid earth-worm may profess love to a woman's person, whilst in reality his affection is centered in her pocket; and the slavish drudge may go a-wooing as he goes to the horse-market to choose one who is stout and firm, and as we may say of an old horse, one who will be a good drudge and draw kindly. I disdain their dirty, puny ideas. I would be heartily out of humour with myself if I thought I were capable of having so poor a notion of the sex, which were designed to crown the pleasures of society. Poor devils! I don't envy them their happiness who have such notions. For my part, I propose quite other pleasures with my dear partner.

R. B.

(2.)

TO MISS E.

MY DEAR E.:

I do not remember in the course of your acquaintance and mine, ever to have heard your opinion on the ordinary way of falling in love, amongst people of our station of life: I do not mean the persons who proceed in the way of bargain, but those whose affection is really placed on the person.

Though I be, as you very well know, but a very awkward lover myself, yet as I have some opportunities of observing the conduct of others who are much better skilled in the affair of courtship than I am, I often think it is owing to lucky chance more than to good management, that there are not more unhappy marriages than usually are.

It is natural for a young fellow to like the acquaintance of the females, and customary for him to keep them company when occasion serves: some one of them is more agreeable to him than the rest; there is something, he knows not what, pleases him, he knows not how, in her company. This I take to be what is called love with the greater part of us; and I must own, dear E., it is a hard game such a one as you have to play, when you meet with such a lover. You cannot refuse but he is sincere, and yet though you use him ever so favourably, perhaps in a few months, or at farthest in a year or two, the same unaccountable fancy may make him as distractedly fond of another, whilst you are quite forgot. I am aware that perhaps the next time I have the pleasure of seeing you, you may bid me take my own lesson home, and tell me that the passion I have professed for you is perhaps one of those transient flashes I have been describing; but I hope, my dear E., you will do me the justice to believe me, when I assure you that the love I have for you is founded on the sacred principles of virtue and honour, and by consequence so long as you continue possessed of those amiable qualities which first inspired my passion for you, so long must I continue to love you. Believe me, my dear, it is love like this alone which can render the marriage state happy. People may talk of flames and raptures as long as they please, and a warm fancy with a flow of youthful spirits, may make them feel something like what they describe; but sure I am the nobler faculties of the mind, with kindred feelings of the heart, can only be the foundation of friendship, and it has always been my opinion that the married life was only friendship in a more exalted degree. If you will be so good as to grant my wishes,

and it should please Providence to spare us to the latest periods of life, I can look forward and see that even then, though bent down with wrinkled age; even then, when all other worldly circumstances will be indifferent to me, I will regard my E. with the tenderest affection, and for this plain reason, because she is still possessed of those noble qualities, improved to a much higher degree, which first inspired my affection for her.

"O! happy state when souls each other draw,
When love is liberty, and nature law."*

I know were I to speak in such a style to many a girl, who thinks herself possessed of no small share of sense, she would think it ridiculous; but the language of the heart is, my dear E., the only courtship I shall ever use to you.

When I look over what I have written, I am sensible it is vastly different from the ordinary style of courtship, but I shall make no apology—I know your good nature will excuse what your good sense may see amiss.

R. B.

* [Pope: *Eloisa to Abelard.*]

(3.) TO MISS E.
I HAVE often thought it a peculiarly unlucky circumstance in love, that though in every other situation in life, telling the truth is not only the safest, but actually by far the easiest way of proceeding, a lover is never under greater difficulty in acting, or more puzzled for expression, than when his passion is sincere, and his intentions are honourable. I do not think that it is very difficult for a person of ordinary capacity to talk of love and fondness which are not felt, and to make vows of constancy and fidelity which are never intended to be performed, if he be villain enough to practise such detestable conduct: but to a man whose heart glows with the principle of integrity and truth, and who sincerely loves a woman of amiable person, uncommon refinement of sentiment and purity of manners—to such a one, in such circumstances, I can assure you, my dear, from my own feelings at this present moment, courtship is a task indeed. There is such a number of foreboding fears, and distrustful anxieties crowd into my mind when I am in your company, or when I sit down to write to you, that what to speak, or what to write I am altogether at a loss.

There is one rule which I have hitherto practised, and which I shall invariably keep with you, and that is honestly to tell you the plain truth. There is something so mean and unmanly in the arts of dissimulation and falsehood, that I am surprised they can be acted by any one in so noble, so generous a passion, as virtuous love. No, my dear E., I shall never endeavour to gain your favour by such detestable practices. If you will be so good and so generous as to admit me for your partner, your companion, your bosom friend through life, there is nothing on this side of eternity shall give me greater transport; but I shall never think of purchasing your hand by any arts unworthy of a man, and I will add of a Christian. There is one thing, my dear, which I earnestly request of you, and it is this; that you would soon either put an end to my hopes by a peremptory refusal, or cure me of my fears by a generous consent.

It would oblige me much if you would send me a line or two when convenient. I shall only add further that, if a behaviour regulated (though perhaps but very imperfectly) by the rules of honour and virtue, if a heart devoted to love and esteem you, and an earnest endeavour to promote your happiness; if these are qualities you would wish in a friend, in a husband, I hope you shall ever find them in your real friend, and sincere lover.

R. B.

(4.)

TO MISS E.

I OUGHT, in good manners, to have acknowledged the receipt of your letter before this time, but my heart was so shocked with the contents of it, that I can scarcely yet collect my thoughts so as to write you on the subject. I will not attempt to describe what I felt on receiving your letter. I read it over and over, again and again, and though it was in the politest language of refusal, still it was peremptory; "you were sorry you could not make me a return, but you wish me," what without you I never can obtain, "you wish me all kind of happiness." It would be weak and unmanly to say that without you I never can be happy; but sure I am, that sharing life with you would have given it a relish, that, wanting you, I can never taste.

Your uncommon personal advantages, and your superior good sense, do not so much strike me; these, possibly in a few instances may be met with in others; but that amiable goodness, that tender feminine softness, that endearing sweetness of disposition, with all the charming offspring of a warm feeling heart—these I never again expect to meet with, in such a degree, in this world. All these charming qualities, heightened by an education much beyond any thing I have ever met in any woman I ever dared to approach, have made an impression on my heart that I do not think the world can ever efface. My imagination had fondly flattered myself with a wish, I dare not say it ever reached a hope, that possibly I might one day call you mine. I had formed the most delightful images, and my fancy fondly brooded over them; but now I am wretched for the loss of what I really had no right to expect. I must now think no more of you as a mistress; still I presume to ask to be admitted as a friend. As such I wish to be allowed to wait on you, and as I expect to remove in a few days a little further off, and you, I suppose, will perhaps soon leave this place, I wish to see or hear from you soon; and if an expression should perhaps escape me, rather too warm for friendship, I hope you will pardon it in, my dear Miss—(pardon me the dear expression for once) * * * *

R. B.

[After such sermonising, the result was by no means wonderful.]

To Miss —.

[Date and person unknown.]

MY DEAR COUNTRYWOMAN,
I AM so impatient to show you that I am once more at peace with you, that I send you the book I mentioned directly,

rather than wait the uncertain time of my seeing you. I am afraid I have mislaid or lost Collins' Poems, which I promised to Miss Irvin. If I can find them, I will forward them by you; if not, you must apologize for me.

I know you will laugh at it when I tell you that your piano and you together have played the deuce somehow about my heart. My breast has been widowed these many months, and I thought myself proof against the fascinating witchcraft; but I am afraid you will "feelingly convince me what I am." I say, I am afraid, because I am not sure what is the matter with me. I have one miserable bad symptom; when you whisper, or look kindly to another, it gives me a draught of damnation. I have a kind of wayward wish to be with you ten minutes by yourself, though what I would say, Heaven above knows, for I am sure I know not. I have no formed design in all this; but just in the nakedness of my heart, write you down a mere matter-of-fact story. You may perhaps give yourself airs of distance on this, and that will completely cure me; but I wish you would not: just let us meet, if you please, in the old beaten way of friendship.

I will not subscribe myself your humble servant, for that is a phrase, I think, at least fifty miles off from the heart; but I will conclude with sincerely wishing that the Great Protector of innocence may shield you from the barbed dart of calumny, and hand you by the covert snare of deceit.

R. B.

To Miss E——.

[See song—"Young Peggy blooms our boniest Lass.]

MADAM,

PERMIT me to present you with the enclosed song as a small though grateful tribute for the honor of your acquaintance. I have, in these verses, attempted some faint sketches of your portrait in the unembellished simple manner of descriptive TRUTH.—Flattery, I leave to your LOVERS, whose exaggerating fancies may make them imagine you still nearer perfection than you really are.

Poets, Madam, of all mankind, feel most forcibly the powers of BEAUTY; as, if they are really POETS of nature's making, their feelings must be finer, and their taste more delicate than most of the world. In the cheerful bloom of SPRING, or the pensive mildness of AUTUMN; the grandeur of SUMMER, or the hoary majesty of WINTER; the poet feels a charm unknown to the rest of his species. Even the sight of a fine flower, or the company of a fine woman (by far the finest part of God's works below), have sensations for the poetic heart that the HERD of man are strangers to.—On this last account, Madam, I am, as in many other things, indebted to Mr. Hamilton's kindness in introducing me to you. Your lovers may view you with a wish, I look on you with pleasure; their hearts, in your presence, may glow with desire, mine rises with admiration.

That the arrows of misfortune, however they should, as incident to humanity, glance a slight wound, may never reach your heart—that the snares of Villainy may never beset

you in the road of life—that INNOCENCE may hand you by the path of HONOR to the dwelling of PEACE, is the sincere wish of him who has the honor to be, &c.

R. B.

To Miss Alexander.

[Rough-draft letter.]

Mossiel, 18th Nov., 1786.

MADAM,

POETS are such outré beings, so much the children of wayward fancy and capricious whim, that I believe the world generally allows them a larger latitude in the laws of propriety, than the sober sons of judgment and prudence. I mention this as an apology for the liberties that a nameless stranger has taken with you in the enclosed poem, which he begs leave to present you with. Whether it has poetical merit any way worthy of the theme, I am not the proper judge; but it is the best my abilities can produce; and what to a good heart will, perhaps, be a superior grace, it is equally sincere as fervent.

The scenery was nearly taken from real life, though I dare say, Madam, you do not recollect it, as I believe you scarcely noticed the poetic *reveur* as he wandered by you. I had roved out as chance directed, in the favourite haunts of my muse on the banks of the Ayr, to view nature in all the gaiety of the vernal year. The evening sun was flaming over the distant western hills; not a breath stirred the crimson opening blossom, or the verdant spreading leaf. It was a golden moment for a poetic heart. I listened to the feathered warblers, pouring their harmony on every hand, with a congenial kindred regard, and frequently turned out of my path, lest I should disturb their little songs, or frighten them to another station. Surely, said I to myself, he must be a wretch indeed, who, regardless of your harmonious endeavour to please him, can eye your elusive flights to discover your secret recesses, and to rob you of all the property nature gives you—your dearest comforts, your helpless nestlings. Even the hoary hawthorn twig that shot across the way, what heart at such a time but must have been interested in its welfare, and wished it preserved from the rudely-browsing cattle, or the withering eastern blast? Such was the scene,—and such the hour, when, in a corner of my prospect, I spied one of the fairest pieces of nature's workmanship that ever crowned a poetic landscape or met a poet's eye, those visionary bards excepted, who hold commerce with aërial beings! Had Calumny and Villainy taken my walk, they had at that moment sworn eternal peace with such an object.

What an hour of inspiration for a poet! It would have raised plain dull historic prose into metaphor and measure.

The enclosed song was the work of my return home: and perhaps it but poorly answers what might have been expected from such a scene.

I have the honor to be,

Madam,

Your most obedient and very humble Servant,

R. B.

* B

To Mrs. Stewart,

OF STAIR AND AFTON.

[Compare Notes on Various Readings, also foregoing letter.]

[1786.]

MADAM,

THE hurry of my preparations for going abroad has hindered me from performing my promise so soon as I intended. I have here sent you a parcel of songs, &c., which never made their appearance, except to a friend or two at most. Perhaps some of them may be no great entertainment to you, but of that I am far from being an adequate judge. The song to the tune of "Ettrick Banks" [The Bonnie Lass of Ballochmyle] you will easily see the impropriety of exposing much, even in manuscript. I think, myself, it has some merit: both as a tolerable description of one of nature's sweetest scenes, a July evening, and one of the finest pieces of nature's workmanship, the finest indeed we know anything of, an amiable, beautiful young woman; but I have no common friend to procure me that permission, without which I would not dare to spread the copy.

I am quite aware, Madam, what task the world would assign me in this letter. The obscure bard, when any of the great condescend to take notice of him, should heap the altar with the incense of flattery. Their high ancestry, their own great and god-like qualities and actions, should be recounted with the most exaggerated description. This, Madam, is a task for which I am altogether unfit. Besides a certain disqualifying pride of heart, I know nothing of your connexions in life, and have no access to where your real character is to be found—the company of your compeers: and more, I am afraid that even the most refined adulation is by no means the road to your good opinion.

One feature of your character I shall ever with grateful pleasure remember;—the reception I got when I had the honor of waiting on you at Stair. I am little acquainted with politeness, but I know a good deal of benevolence of temper and goodness of heart. Surely, did those in exalted stations know how happy they could make some classes of their inferiors by condescension and affability, they would never stand so high, measuring out with every look the height of their elevation, but condescend as sweetly as did Mrs Stewart of Stair.

R. B.

(1.)

To Mrs. Dunlop,

OF DUNLOP.

Ayrshire, 1786.

MADAM,

I AM truly sorry I was not at home yesterday, when I was so much honor'd with your order for my copies, and incomparably more by the handsome compliments you are pleased to pay my poetic abilities. I am fully persuaded that there is not any class of mankind so feelingly alive to the titillations of applause as the sons of Parnassus: nor is it easy to

conceive how the heart of the poor bard dances with rapture, when those, whose character in life gives them a right to be polite judges, honor him with their approbation. Had you been thoroughly acquainted with me, Madam, you could not have touched my darling heart-chord more sweetly than by noticing my attempts to celebrate your illustrious ancestor, the Saviour of his Country.

"Great patriot hero! ill-requited chief!"

The first book I met with in my early years, which I perused with pleasure, was "The Life of Hannibal;" the next was "The History of Sir William Wallace:" for several of my earlier years I had few other authors; and many a solitary hour have I stole out, after the laborious vocations of the day, to shed a tear over their glorious, but unfortunate stories. In those boyish days I remember, in particular, being struck with that part of Wallace's story where these lines occur—

"Syne to the Leglen wood, when it was late,
To make a silent and a safe retreat."

I chose a fine summer Sunday, the only day my line of life allowed, and walked half a dozen of miles to pay my respects to the Leglen wood, with as much devout enthusiasm as ever pilgrim did to Loretto; and, as I explored every den and dell where I could suppose my heroic countryman to have lodged, I recollect (for even then I was a rhymer) that my heart glowed with a wish to be able to make a song on him in some measure equal to his merits.

R. B.

(2.)

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Edinburgh, 15th January, 1787.

MADAM.

YOURS of the 9th current, which I am this moment honor'd with, is a deep reproach to me for ungrateful neglect. I will tell you the real truth, for I am miserably awkward at a fib. I wished to have written to Dr. Moore before I wrote to you; but though every day since I received yours of December 30th, the idea, the wish to write to him has constantly pressed on my thoughts, yet I could not for my soul set about it. I know his fame and character, and I am one of "the sons of little men." To write him a mere matter-of-fact affair, like a merchant's order, would be disgracing the little character I have; and to write the author of "The View of Society and Manners" a letter of sentiment—I declare every artery runs cold at the thought. I shall try, however, to write to him tomorrow or next day. His kind interposition in my behalf I have already experienced, as a gentleman waited on me the other day, on the part of Lord Eglintoun, with ten guineas, by way of subscription for two copies of my next edition.

The word you object to in the mention I have made of my glorious countryman and your immortal ancestor, is indeed borrowed from Thomson; but it does not strike me as an improper epithet. I distrusted my own judgment on your finding fault with it, and applied for the opinion of some of the literati here, who honor me with their critical strictures, and they all allow it to be proper. The song you ask I cannot

recollect, and I have not a copy of it. I have not composed anything on the great Wallace, except what you have seen in print; and the enclosed, which I will print in this edition. You will see I have mentioned some others of the name. When I composed my "Vision" long ago, I had attempted a description of Koyle, of which the additional stanzas are a part, as it originally stood. My heart glows with a wish to do justice to the merits of the "Saviour of his Country," which sooner or later I shall at least attempt.

You are afraid I shall grow intoxicated with my prosperity as a poet: alas! Madam, I know myself and the world too well. I do not mean any airs of affected modesty; I am willing to believe that my abilities deserve some notice; but in a most enlightened, informed age and nation, when poetry is and has been the study of men of the first natural genius, aided with all the powers of polite learning, polite books, and polite company—to be dragged forth to the full glare of learned and polite observation, with all my imperfections of awkward rusticity and crude unpolished ideas on my head—I assure you, Madam, I do not dissemble when I tell you I tremble for the consequences. The novelty of a poet in my obscure situation, without any of those advantages which are reckoned necessary for that character, at least at this time of day, has raised a partial tide of public notice which has borne me to a height, where I am absolutely, feelingly certain, my abilities are inadequate to support me; and too surely do I see that time when the same tide will leave me, and recede perhaps as far below the mark of truth. I do not say this in the ridiculous affectation of self-abasement and modesty. I have studied myself, and know what ground I occupy; and, however a friend or the world may differ from me in that particular, I stand for my own opinion, in silent resolve, with all the tenaciousness of property. I mention this to you once for all to disburthen my mind, and I do not wish to hear or say more about it.—But,

"When proud fortune's ebbing tide recedes,"

you will bear me witness, that when my bubble of fame was at the highest, I stood un intoxicated with the inebriating cup in my hand, looking forward with rueful resolve to the hastening time, when the blow of Calumny should dash it to the ground, with all the eagerness of vengeful triumph.

Your patronizing me and interesting yourself in my fame and character as a poet, I rejoice in; it exalts me in my own idea; and whether you can or cannot aid me in my subscription is a trifle. Has a paltry subscription-bill any charms to the heart of a bard, compared with the patronage of the descendant of the immortal Wallace?

R. B.

(3.) ✓

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Edinburgh, 22nd March, 1787.

MADAM,

I READ your letter with watery eyes. A little, very little while ago, I had scarce a friend but the stubborn pride of my own bosom; now I am distinguished, patronized, befriended by you. Your friendly advices, I will not give them the cold name of criticisms, I receive with reverence. I have made

some small alterations in what I before had printed. I have the advice of some very judicious friends among the literati here, but with them I sometimes find it necessary to claim the privilege of thinking for myself. The noble Earl of Glencairn, to whom I owe more than to any man, does me the honor of giving me his strictures: his hints, with respect to impropriety or indelicacy, I follow implicitly.

You kindly interest yourself in my future views and prospects; there I can give you no light. It is all

"Dark as was Chaos ere the infant sun
Was roll'd together, or had tried his beams
Athwart the gloom profound."

The appellation of a Scottish bard, is by far my highest pride; to continue to deserve it is my most exalted ambition. Scottish scenes and Scottish story are the themes I could wish to sing. I have no dearer aim than to have it in my power, unplagued with the routine of business—for which heaven knows I am unfit enough—to make leisurely pilgrimages through Caledonia; to sit on the fields of her battles; to wander on the romantic banks of her rivers; and to muse by the stately towers or venerable ruins, once the honored abodes of her heroes.

But these are all Utopian thoughts: I have dallied long enough with life; 'tis time to be in earnest. I have a fond, an aged mother to care for: and some other bosom-ties perhaps equally tender. Where the individual only suffers by the consequences of his own thoughtlessness, indolence, or folly, he may be excusable; nay, shining abilities, and some of the nobler virtues, may half sanctify a heedless character; but where God and nature have entrusted the welfare of others to his care; where the trust is sacred, and the ties are dear, that man must be far gone in selfishness, or strangely lost to reflection, whom these connexions will not rouse to exertion.

I guess that I shall clear between two and three hundred pounds by my authorship; with that sum I intend, so far as I may be said to have any intention, to return to my old acquaintance, the plough, and, if I can meet with a lease by which I can live, to commence farmer. I do not intend to give up poetry; being bred to labour, secures me independence, and the Muses are my chief, sometimes have been my only enjoyment. If my practice second my resolution, I shall have principally at heart the serious business of life; but while following my plough, or building up my shocks, I shall cast a leisure glance to that dear, that only feature of my character, which gave me the notice of my country, and the patronage of a Wallace.

Thus, honored Madam, I have given you the bard, his situation, and his views, native as they are in his own bosom.

R. B.

(4.)

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Edinburgh, 15th April, 1787.

MADAM,

THERE is an affectation of gratitude which I dislike. The periods of Johnson, and the pauses of Sterne, may hide a selfish heart. For my part, Madam, I trust I have too much

pride for servility, and too little prudence for selfishness. I have this moment broken open your letter, but

"Rude am I in speech,
And therefore little can I grace my cause
In speaking for myself—"

so I shall not trouble you with any fine speeches and hunted figures. I shall just lay my hand on my heart and say, I hope I shall ever have the truest, the warmest sense of your goodness.

I come abroad in print, for certain on Wednesday. Your orders I shall punctually attend to; only, by the way, I must tell you that I was paid before for Dr. Moore's and Miss Williams' copies, through the medium of Commissioner Cochran in this place, but that we can settle when I have the honor of waiting on you.

Dr. Smith* was just gone to London the morning before I received your letter to him.

R. B.

*[Dr. Adam Smith, author of the *Wealth of Nations*.]

(5.)

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

[Extract by Currie.]

Edinburgh, 30th April, 1787.

YOUR criticisms, Madam, I understand very well, and could have wished to have pleased you better. You are right in your guess that I am not very amenable to counsel. Poets, much my superiors, have so flattered those who possessed the adventitious qualities of wealth and power, that I am determined to flatter no created being, either in prose or verse.

I set as little by princes, lords, clergy, critics, &c., as all these respective gentry do by my bardship. I know what I may expect from the world by and by—illiberal abuse, and perhaps contemptuous neglect.

I am happy, Madam, that some of my own favourite pieces are distinguished by your particular approbation. For my "Dream," which has unfortunately incurred your loyal displeasure, I hope in four weeks, or less, to have the honor of appearing at Dunlop, in its defence in person.

R. B.

(6.)

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Edinburgh, 21st January, 1788.

AFTER six weeks' confinement, I am beginning to walk across the room. They have been six horrible weeks; anguish and low spirits made me unfit to read, write, or think.

I have a hundred times wished that one could resign life as an officer resigns a commission: for I would not take in any poor ignorant wretch, by selling out. Lately I was a six-penny private: and, God knows, a miserable soldier enough; now I march to the campaign, a starving cadet: a little more conspicuously wretched.

I am ashamed of all this; for though I do want bravery for the warfare of life, I could wish, like some other soldiers, to

have as much fortitude or cunning as to dissemble or conceal my cowardice.

As soon as I can bear the journey, which will be, I suppose, about the middle of next week, I leave Edinburgh: and soon after I shall pay my grateful duty at Dunlop-House.

R. B.

(7.)

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

[Extract by Currie.]

Edinburgh, 12th February, 1788.

SOME things in your late letters hurt me: not that *you say them*, but that *you mistake me*. Religion, my honored Madam, has not only been all my life my chief dependence, but my dearest enjoyment. I have, indeed, been the luckless victim of wayward follies; but, alas! I have ever been "more fool than knave." A mathematician without religion is a probable character; an irreligious poet is a monster.

* * * * *

R. B.

(8.)

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Mossigel, 7th March, 1788.

MADAM,

THE last paragraph in yours of the 30th February affected me most, so I shall begin my answer where you ended your letter. That I am often a sinner with any little wit I have, I do confess: but I have taxed my recollection to no purpose, to find out when it was employed against you. I hate an ungenerous sarcasm a great deal worse than I do the devil; at least as Milton describes him; and though I may be rascally enough to be sometimes guilty of it myself, I cannot endure it in others. You, my honored friend, who cannot appear in any light but you are sure of being respectable—you can afford to pass by an occasion to display your wit, because you may depend for fame on your sense; or, if you choose to be silent, you know you can rely on the gratitude of many, and the esteem of all; but, God help us who are wits or witlings by profession: if we stand not for fame there, we sink unsupported!

I am highly flattered by the news you tell me of Coila.* I may say to the fair painter who does me so much honor, as Dr. Beattie says to Ross the poet of his muse Scota, from which, by the by, I took the idea of Coila ('tis a poem of Beattie's in the Scottish dialect, which perhaps you have never seen):—

"Ye shake your head, but o' my fegs,
Ye've set awld Scota on her legs:
Lang had she lien wi' heffy and fleggs,
Bumbaz'd and dizzie,
Her fiddle wanted strings and pegs.
Wae's me, poor hizzie."⁺

* [A lady (daughter of Mrs. Dunlop) was making a picture from the description of *Coila* in the "Vision."—Currie.]

+ [Lines quoted are from Beattie; poem referred to is by Ross.]

R. B.

(9.) TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Mauchline, 28th April, 1788.

MADAM,

YOUR powers of reprobation must be great indeed, as I assure you they made my heart ache with penitential pangs, even though I was really not guilty. As I commence farmer at Whitsunday, you will easily guess I must be pretty busy; but that is not all. As I got the offer of the excise business without solicitation, and as it costs me only six months' attendance for instructions, to entitle me to a commission—which commission lies by me, and at any future period, on my simple petition, can be resumed—I thought five-and-thirty-pounds a-year was no bad *dernier ressort* for a poor poet, if Fortune in her jade tricks should kick him down from the little eminence to which she has lately helped him up.

For this reason, I am at present attending these instructions, to have them completed before Whitsunday. Still, Madam, I prepared with the sincerest pleasure to meet you at the Mount, and came to my brother's on Saturday night, to set out on Sunday; but for some nights preceding I had slept in an apartment, where the force of the winds and rains was only mitigated by being sifted through numberless apertures in the windows, walls, &c. In consequence, I was on Sunday, Monday, and part of Tuesday, unable to stir out of bed, with all the miserable effects of a violent cold.

You see, Madam, the truth of the French maxim, *Le vrai n'est pas toujours le vrai-semblable*. Your last was so full of expostulation, and was something so like the language of an offended friend, that I began to tremble for a correspondence, which I had with grateful pleasure set down as one of the greatest enjoyments of my future life. * * * *

Your books have delighted me: Virgil, Dryden, and Tasso, were all equally strangers to me; but of this more at large in my next.

R. B.

*[Should of course be weeks'.]

(10.)

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

[Extract by Currie.]

Mauchline, 4th May, 1788.

MADAM,

DRYDEN'S Virgil has delighted me. I do not know whether the critics will agree with me, but the Georgics are to me by far the best of Virgil. It is indeed a species of writing entirely new to me; and has filled my head with a thousand fancies of emulation: but, alas! when I read the Georgics, and then survey my own powers, 'tis like the idea of a Shetland pony drawn up by the side of a thorough-bred hunter, to start for the plate. I own I am disappointed in the *Aeneid*. Faultless correctness may please, and does highly please, the lettered critic: but to that awful character I have not the most distant pretensions. I do not know whether I do not hazard my pretensions to be a critic of any kind, when I say that I think

Virgil, in many instances, a servile copier of Homer. If I had the *Odyssey* by me, I could parallel many passages where Virgil has evidently copied, but by no means improved, Homer. Nor can I think there is anything of this owing to the translators; for, from every thing I have seen of Dryden, I think him in genius and fluency of language, Pope's master. I have not perused Tasso enough to form an opinion: in some future letter, you shall have my ideas of him; though I am conscious my criticisms must be very inaccurate and imperfect, as there I have ever felt and lamented my want of learning most.

R. B.

(11.) TO MRS. DUNLOP.

27th May, 1788.

MADAM,

I HAVE been torturing my philosophy to no purpose, to account for that kind partiality of yours, which unlike * * * * has followed me, in my return to the shade of life, with assiduous benevolence. Often did I regret, in the fleeting hours of my late will-o'-wisp appearance, that "here I had no continuing city;" and, but for the consolation of a few solid guineas, could almost lament the time that a momentary acquaintance with wealth and splendour put me so much out of conceit with the sworn companions of my road through life—insignificance and poverty. * * * *

There are few circumstances relating to the unequal distribution of the good things of this life that give me more vexation (I mean in what I see around me) than the importance the opulent bestow on their trifling family affairs, compared with the very same things on the contracted scale of a cottage. Last afternoon I had the honor to spend an hour or two at a good woman's fire-side, where the planks that composed the floor were decorated with a splendid carpet, and the gay table sparkled with silver and china. 'Tis now about term-day, and there has been a revolution among those creatures, who though in appearance partakers, and equally noble partakers, of the same nature with Madame, are from time to time—their nerves, their sinews, their health, strength, wisdom, experience, genius, time, nay a good part of their very thoughts—sold for months and years, not only to the necessities, the conveniences, but, the caprices of the important few.* We talked of the insignificant creatures; nay, notwithstanding their general stupidity and rascality, did some of the poor devils the honor to commend them. But light be the turf upon his breast who taught "Reverence thyself!" We looked down on the unpolished wretches, their impudent wives and clouterly brats, as the lordly bull does on the little dirty ant-hill, whose puny inhabitants he crushes in the carelessness of his ramble, or tosses in the air in the wantonness of his pride.

R. B.

*[Hiring terms for domestic servants—Whitsunday and Martinmas.]

(12.)

TO MRS. DUNLOP,
AT MR. DUNLOP'S, HADDINGTON.

Ellisland, 13th June, 1788.

"Where'er I roam, whatever realms I see,
My heart, untravell'd, fondly turns to thee :
Still to my friend it turns with ceaseless pain,
And drags at each remove a lengthen'd chain."

GOLDSMITH.

THIS is the second day, my honored friend, that I have been on my farm. A solitary inmate of an old smoky spence; far from every object I love, or by whom I am beloved; nor any acquaintance older than yesterday, except Jenny Geddes, the old mare I ride on; while uncouth cares and novel plans hourly insult my awkward ignorance and bashful inexperience. There is a foggy atmosphere native to my soul in the hour of care; consequently the dreary objects seem larger than the life. Extreme sensibility, irritated and prejudiced on the gloomy side by a series of misfortunes and disappointments, at that period of my existence when the soul is laying in her cargo of ideas for the voyage of life, is, I believe, the principal cause of this unhappy frame of mind.

"The valiant, in himself, what can he suffer?
Or what need he regard his *single woes*?" &c.

Your surmise, Madam, is just; I am indeed a husband.

* * * *

To jealousy or infidelity I am an equal stranger. My preservative from the first is the most thorough consciousness of her sentiments of honor, and her attachment to me; my antidote against the last is my deep-rooted affection for her.

In housewife matters, of aptness to learn and activity to execute, she is eminently mistress; and during my absence in Nithsdale, she is regularly and constantly apprentice to my mother and sisters in their dairy and other rural business.

The Muses must not be offended when I tell them, the concerns of my wife and family will, in my mind, always take the *pas*; but I assure them, their ladyships will ever come next in place.

You are right that a bachelor state would have ensured me more friends; but, from a cause you will easily guess, conscious peace in the enjoyment of my own mind, and unmistrusting confidence in approaching my God, would seldom have been of the number.

I found a once much-loved and still much-loved female, literally and truly cast out to the mercy of the naked elements, but as I enabled her to *purchase* a shelter;—and there is no sporting with a fellow-creature's happiness or misery.

The most placid good-nature and sweetness of disposition; a warm heart, gratefully devoted with all its powers to love me; vigorous health and sprightly cheerfulness, set off to the best advantage by a more than commonly handsome figure; these, I think, in a woman, may make a good wife, though she should never have read a page but the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, nor have danced in a brighter assembly than a penny-pay-wedding.

R. B.

(13.)

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Mauchline, 2nd August, 1788.

HONORED MADAM,

YOUR kind letter welcomed me, yesternight, to Ayrshire. I am, indeed, seriously angry with you at the quantum of your luckpenny; but, vexed and hurt as I was, I could not help laughing very heartily at the noble lord's apology for the missed napkin.

I would write you from Nithsdale, and give you my direction there, but I have scarce an opportunity of calling at a post-office once in a fortnight. I am six miles from Dumfries, am scarcely ever in it myself, and, as yet, have little acquaintance in the neighbourhood. Besides, I am now very busy on my farm, building a dwelling house; as at present I am almost an evangelical man in Nithsdale, for I have scarce "where to lay my head."

There are some passages in your last that brought tears in my eyes, "The heart knoweth its own sorrows, and a stranger intermeddleth not therewith." The repository of these "sorrows of the heart" is a kind of *sanctum sanctorum*: and 'tis only a chosen friend, and that, too, at particular, sacred times, who dares enter into them:—

"Heaven oft tears the bosom-chords
That nature finest strung."

You will excuse this quotation for the sake the author. Instead of entering on this subject farther, I shall transcribe you a few lines I wrote in a hermitage, belonging to a gentleman in my Nithsdale neighbourhood. They are almost the only favours the Muses have conferred on me in that country.

[Lines in Friars-Carse Hermitage, here transcribed.]

Since I am in the way of transcribing, the following were the production of yesterday as I jogged through the wild hills of New Cumnock. I intend inserting them, or something like them, in an epistle I am going to write to the gentleman on whose friendship my Excise hopes depend, Mr. Graham, of Fintry; one of the worthiest and most accomplished gentlemen, not only of this country, but, I will dare to say it, of this age. The following are just the first crude thoughts "unhouse'd, unanointed, unaneal'd":—

* * * * *

Pity the tuneful Muses' helpless train;
Weak, timid landsmen on life's stormy main :
The world were blest, did bliss on them depend ;
Ah, that "the friendly e'er should want a friend!"
The little fate bestows they share as soon ;
Unlike sage, proverb'd, Wisdom's hard-wrung boon.
Let Prudence number o'er each sturdy son,
Who life and wisdom at one race begun ;
Who feel by reason and who give by rule ;
Instinct's a brute and Sentiment a fool !
Who make poor *will do* wait upon *I should* ;
We own they're prudent, but who owns they're good ?
Ye wise ones, hence ! ye hurt the social eye ;
God's imago rudely etch'd on base alloy !
But come * * * * *

Here the Muse left me. I am astonished at what you tell me of Anthony's writing me. I never received it. Poor fellow! you vex me much by telling me that he is unfortunate. I shall be in Ayrshire ten days from this date. I have just room for an old Roman farewell.

R. B.

(14.) TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Mauchline, 10th August, 1788.

MY MUCH HONORED FRIEND,

YOURS of the 24th June is before me. I found it, as well as another valued friend—my wife, waiting to welcome me to Ayrshire: I met both with the sincerest pleasure.

When I write you, Madam, I do not sit down to answer every paragraph of yours, by echoing every sentiment, like the faithful Commons of Great Britain in Parliament assembled, answering a speech from the best of kings! I express myself in the fulness of my heart, and may, perhaps, be guilty of neglecting some of your kind inquiries; but not from your very odd reason, that I do not read your letters. All your epistles for several months have cost me nothing, except a swelling throb of gratitude, or a deep-felt sentiment of veneration.

Mrs. Burns, Madam, is the identical woman * * *

When she first found herself "as women wish to be who love their lords," as I loved her nearly to distraction, we took steps for a private marriage. Her parents got the hint: and not only forbade me her company and their house, but, on my rumoured West Indian voyage, got a warrant to put me in jail, till I should find security in my about-to-be paternal relation. You know my lucky reverse of fortune. On my *éclatant* return to Mauchline, I was made very welcome to visit my girl. The usual consequences began to betray her; and, as I was at that time laid up a cripple in Edinburgh, she was turned, literally turned out of doors, and I wrote to a friend to shelter her till my return, when our marriage was declared. Her happiness or misery were in my hands, and who could trifle with such a deposit? * * *

I can easily fancy a more agreeable companion for my journey of life; but, upon my honor, I have never seen the individual instance. * * *

Circumstanced as I am, I could never have got a female partner for life, who could have entered into my favourite studies, relished my favourite authors, &c., without probably entailing on me at the same time expensive living, fantastic caprice, perhaps apish affectation, with all the other blessed boarding-school acquirements, which (*pardonnez moi, Madame*) are sometimes to be found among females of the upper ranks, but almost universally pervade the misses of the would-be gentry. * * *

I like your way in your church-yard lucubrations. Thoughts that are the spontaneous result of accidental situations, either respecting health, place, or company, have often a strength, and always an originality, that would in vain be looked for in fancied circumstances and studied paragraphs. For me, I

have often thought of keeping a letter in progression by me, to send you when the sheet was written out. Now I talk of sheets, I must tell you my reason for writing to you on paper of this kind is my pruriency of writing to you at large. A page of post is on such a dis-social, narrow-minded scale, that I cannot abide it; and double letters, at least in my miscellaneous reverie manner, are a monstrous tax in a close correspondence.

R. B.

(15.) TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Ellisland, 16th August, 1788.

I AM in a fine disposition, my honored friend, to send you an elegiac epistle; and want only genius to make it quite Shenstonian:—

"Why droops my heart with fancied woes forlorn?
Why sinks my soul beneath each wintry sky?"

My increasing cares in this, as yet strange country—gloomy conjectures in the dark vista of futurity—consciousness of my own inability for the struggle of the world—my broadened mark to misfortune in a wife and children:—I could indulge these reflections, till my humor should ferment into the most acid chagrin, that would corrode the very thread of life.

To counterwork these baneful feelings, I have sat down to write to you; as I declare upon my soul I always find that the most sovereign balm for my wounded spirit.

I was yesterday at Mr. Miller's to dinner for the first time. My reception was quite to my mind: from the lady of the house quite flattering. She sometimes hits on a couplet or two *impromptu*. She repeated one or two to the admiration of all present. My suffrage, as a professional man, was expected: I for once went agonizing over the belly of my conscience. Pardon me, ye my adored household gods, independence of spirit, and integrity of soul! In the course of conversation, "Johnson's Musical Museum," a collection of Scottish songs with the music, was talked of. We got a song on the harpsichord, beginning,

"Raving winds around her blowing."

The air was much admired: the lady of the house asked me whose were the words. "Mine, Madam—they are indeed my very best verses;" she took not the smallest notice of them! The old Scottish proverb says well, "king's caff is better than other folks' corn." I was going to make a New Testament quotation about "casting pearls," but that would be too virulent, for the lady is actually a woman of sense and taste.

After all that has been said on the other side of the question, man is by no means a happy creature. I do not speak of the selected few, favoured by partial heaven, whose souls are tuned to gladness amid riches and honors, and prudence and wisdom. I speak of the neglected many, whose nerves, whose sinews, whose days are sold to the minions of fortune.

If I thought you had never seen it, I would transcribe for you a stanza of an old Scottish ballad, called, "The Life and Age of Man;" beginning thus:

✓
"Twas in the sixteenth hunder year
Of God and fifty-three,
Frae Christ was born, that bought us dear,
As writings testifie."

I had an old grand-uncle, with whom my mother lived awhile in her girlish years: the good old man, for such he was, was long blind ere he died; during which time his highest enjoyment was to sit down and cry, while my mother would sing the simple old song of "the Life and Age of Man."

It is this way of thinking; it is these melancholy truths, that make religion so precious to the poor, miserable children of men.—If it is a mere phantom, existing only in the heated imagination of enthusiasm,

"What truth on earth so precious as the lie?"

My idle reasonings sometimes make me a little sceptical, but the necessities of my heart always give the cold philosophisings the lie. Who looks for the heart weaned from earth; the soul affianced to her God; the correspondence fixed with heaven; the pious supplication and devout thanksgiving, constant as the vicissitudes of even and morn; who thinks to meet with these in the court, the palace, in the glare of public life? No: to find them in their precious importance and divine efficacy, we must search among the obscure recesses of disappointment, affliction, poverty, and distress.

I am sure, dear Madam, you are now more than pleased with the length of my letters. I return to Ayrshire middle of next week; and it quickens my pace to think that there will be a letter from you waiting me there. I must be here again very soon for my harvest.

R. B.

✓
(16) TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Mauchline, 27th Sept. 1788.

I HAVE received twins, dear Madam, more than once; but scarcely ever with more pleasure than when I received yours of the 12th instant. To make myself understood: I had wrote to Mr. Graham, enclosing my poem addressed to him, and the same post which favoured me with yours brought me an answer from him. It was dated the very day he had received mine; and I am quite at a loss to say whether it was most polite or kind.

Your criticisms, my honored benefactress, are truly the work of a friend. They are not the blasting depredations of a canker-toothed, caterpillar critic; nor are they the fair statement of cold impartiality, balancing with unfeeling exactitude the *pro* and *con* of an author's merits; they are the judicious observations of animated friendship, selecting the beauties of the piece. I am just arrived from Nithsdale, and will be here a fortnight. I was on horseback this morning by three o'clock; for between my wife and my farm is just forty-six miles. As I jogged on in the dark, I was taken with a poetic fit as follows:

"Mrs. Ferguson of Craigdarroch's lamentation for the death of her son; an uncommonly promising youth of eighteen or nineteen years of age.

"Fate gave the word—the arrow sped,
And pierc'd my darling's heart."

You will not send me your poetic rambles, but, you see, I am no niggard of mine. I am sure your impromptus give me double pleasure; what falls from your pen can neither be unentertaining in itself, nor indifferent to me.

The one fault you found, is just; but I cannot please myself in an emendation.

What a life of solicitude is the life of a parent! You interested me much in your young couple.

I would not take my folio paper for this epistle, and now I repent it. I am so jaded with my dirty long journey that I was afraid to drawl into the essence of dulness with any thing larger than a quarto, and so I must leave out another rhyme of this morning's manufacture.

I will pay the sapientipotent George most chearfully, to hear from you ere I leave Ayrshire.

R. B.

—
(17.) TO MRS. DUNLOP,
AT MOREHAM MAINS.

Mauchline, 13th November, 1788.

MADAM,

I HAD the very great pleasure of dining at Dunlop yesterday. Men are said to flatter women because they are weak; if it is so, poets must be weaker still; for Misses R. and K. and Miss G. M'K. with their flattering attentions, and artful compliments, absolutely turned my head. I own they did not lard me over as many a poet does his patron, but they so intoxicated me with their sly insinuations and delicate inuendos of compliment, that if it had not been for a lucky recollection, how much additional weight and lustre your good opinion and friendship must give me in that circle, I had certainly looked upon myself as a person of no small consequence. I dare not say one word how much I was charmed with the Major's friendly welcome, elegant manner, and acute remark, lest I should be thought to balance my Orientalisms of applause over-against the finest quey in Ayrshire, which he made me a present of to help and adorn my farm-stock. As it was on Hallow-day, I am determined annually, as that day returns, to decorate her horns with an ode of gratitude to the family of Dunlop.

* * * * *

So soon as I know of your arrival at Dunlop, I will take the first conveniency to dedicate a day, or perhaps two, to you and friendship, under the guarantee of the Major's hospitality. There will soon be threescore-and-ten miles of permanent distance between us; and now that your friendship and friendly correspondence is entwisted with the heart-strings of my enjoyment of life, I must indulge myself in a happy day of "The feast of reason and the flow of soul."

R. B.

(18.) TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Ellisland, 17th December, 1788.

MY DEAR HONORED FRIEND,

YOURS, dated Edinburgh, which I have just read, makes me very unhappy. "Almost blind and wholly deaf," are melancholy news of human nature; but when told of a much-loved and honored friend, they carry misery in the sound. Goodness on your part, and gratitude on mine, began a tie which has gradually entwisted itself among the dearest chords of my bosom, and I tremble at the omens of your late and present ailing habit and shattered health. You miscalculate matters widely, when you forbid my waiting on you, lest it should hurt my worldly concerns. My small scale of farming is exceedingly more simple and easy, than what you have lately seen at Moreham Mains. But, be that as it may, the heart of the man and the fancy of the poet are the two grand considerations for which I live: if miry ridges and dirty dunghills are to engross the best part of the functions of my soul immortal, I had better been a rook or a magpie at once, and then I should not have been plagued with any ideas superior to breaking of clods and picking up grubs; not to mention barn-door cocks or mallards, creatures with which I could almost exchange lives at any time. If you continue so deaf, I am afraid a visit will be no great pleasure to either of us; but if I hear you are got so well again as to be able to relish conversation, look you to it, Madam, for I will make my threatening good. I am to be at the New-year-day fair of Ayr; and, by all that is sacred in the world, friend, I will come and see you.

Your meeting, which you so well describe, with your old schoolfellow and friend, was truly interesting. Out upon the ways of the world!—They spoil these "social offspring of the heart." Two veterans of the "men of the world" would have met with little more heart-workings than two old hacks worn out on the road. Apropos, is not the Scotch phrase, "Auld lang syne," exceedingly expressive? There is an old song and tune which has often thrilled through my soul. You know I am an enthusiast in old Scotch songs. I shall give you the verses on the other sheet, as I suppose Mr. Ker* will save you the postage.

[Should auld acquaintance be forgot?]

Light be the turf on the breast of the Heaven-inspired poet who composed this glorious fragment! There is more of the fire of native genius in it than in half-a-dozen of modern English Bacchanalians! Now I am on my hobby-horse, I cannot help inserting two other old stanzas, which please me mightily:—

[Go fetch to me a pint of wine.]

R. B.

* [Mr. Ker was the postmaster in Edinburgh—a very different kind of official from what have since ruled in the same chair. This worthy man was always ready to frank a letter for a friend. Strange stories are told of weighty packets—one, it is said, containing a pair of buckskin breeches for a sportsman in the Highlands—passing free through the post-office in his day.—*Chambers.*]

[The reader will observe that the "old stanzas" here spoken of, as of unknown authorship, and associated as such with 'Auld Lang Syne,' are all, except the first four lines, by Burns himself: which may be considered conclusive evidence on the subject of Auld Lang Syne itself. See Notes—p. 291.]

(19.) TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Ellisland, New-year's-day Morning, 1789.

THIS, dear Madam, is a morning of wishes, and would to God that I came under the apostle James's description!—the prayer of a righteous man availeth much. In that case, Madam, you should welcome in a year full of blessings: every thing that obstructs or disturbs tranquillity and self-enjoyment should be removed, and every pleasure that frail humanity can taste should be yours. I own myself so little a Presbyterian, that I approve of set times and seasons of more than ordinary acts of devotion, for breaking in on that habituated routine of life and thought, which is so apt to reduce our existence to a kind of instinct, or even sometimes, and with some minds, to a state very little superior to mere machinery.

This day, the first Sunday of May, a breezy, blue-skyed noon some time about the beginning, and a hoary morning and calm sunny day about the end, of autumn! these, time out of mind, have been with me a kind of holiday.

I believe I owe this to that glorious paper in the Spectator, "The Vision of Mirza," a piece that struck my young fancy before I was capable of fixing an idea to a word of three syllables: "On the 5th day of the moon, which, according to the custom of my forefathers, I always *keep holy*, after having washed myself, and offered up my morning devotions, I ascended the high hill of Bagdad, in order to pass the rest of the day in meditation and prayer."

We know nothing, or next to nothing, of the substance or structure of our souls, so cannot account for those seeming caprices in them, that one should be particularly pleased with this thing, or struck with that, which, on minds of a different cast, makes no extraordinary impression. I have some favourite flowers in spring, among which are the mountain-daisy, the hare-bell, the fox-glove, the wild brier-rose, the budding birch, and the hoary hawthorn, that I view and hang over with particular delight. I never hear the loud solitary whistle of the curlew in a summer noon, or the wild mixing cadence of a troop of grey plovers in an autumnal morning, without feeling an elevation of soul like the enthusiasm of devotion or poetry. Tell me, my dear friend, to what can this be owing? Are we a piece of machinery, which, like the *Æolian* harp, passive, takes the impression of the passing accident? Or do these workings argue something within us above the trodden clod? I own myself partial to such proofs of those awful and important realities—a God that made all things—man's immaterial and immortal nature—and a world of weal or woe beyond death and the grave.

R. B.

[Let reader compare this beautiful letter with "Elegy on Captain Matthew Henderson," p. 114, Poetical Works. By 'spring' we must here understand early summer.]

(20.)

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Ellisland, 4th March, 1789.

HERE am I, my honored friend, returned safe from the capital. To a man who has a home, however humble or remote—if that home is like mine, the scene of domestic comfort—the bustle of Edinburgh will soon be a business of sickening disgust.

"Vain pomp and glory of this world, I hate you!"

When I must skulk into a corner, lest the rattling equipage of some gaping blockhead should mangle me in the mire, I am tempted to exclaim—"What merits has he had, or what demerit have I had, in some state of pre-existence, that he is ushered into this state of being with the sceptre of rule, and the key of riches in his puny fist, and I am kicked into the world, the sport of folly, or the victim of pride?" I have read somewhere of a monarch (in Spain I think it was), who was so out of humour with the Ptolemaic system of astronomy, that he said had he been of the Creator's council, he could have saved him a great deal of labour and absurdity. I will not defend this blasphemous speech; but often, as I have glided with humble stealth through the pomp of Prince's Street, it has suggested itself to me, as an improvement on the present human figure, that a man in proportion to his own conceit of his consequence in the world, could have pushed out the longitude of his common size, as a snail pushes out his horns, or, as we draw out a perspective. This trifling alteration, not to mention the prodigious saving it would be in the tear and wear of the neck and limb-sinews of many of his majesty's liege subjects, in the way of tossing the head and tiptoe strutting, would evidently turn out a vast advantage, in enabling us at once to adjust the ceremonials in making a bow, or making way to a great man; and that too within a second of the precise spherical angle of reverence, or an inch of the particular point of respectful distance, which the important creature itself requires; as a measuring-glance at its towering altitude, would determine the affair like instinct.

Your are right, Madam, in your idea of poor Mylne's poem, which he has addressed to me. The piece has a good deal of merit, but it has one great fault—it is, by far, too long. Besides, my success has encouraged such a shoal of ill-spawned monsters to crawl into public notice, under the title of Scottish Poets, that the very term Scottish Poetry borders on the burlesque. When I write to Mr. Carfrae, I shall advise him rather to try one of his deceased friend's English pieces. I am prodigiously hurried with my own matters, else I would have requested a perusal of all Mylne's poetic performances; and would have offered his friends my assistance in either selecting or correcting what would be proper for the press. What it is that occupies me so much, and perhaps a little oppresses my present spirits, shall fill up a paragraph in some future letter. In the mean time, allow me to close this epistle with a few lines done by a friend of mine * * * *. I give you them, that as you have seen the original, you may guess whether one or two alterations I have ventured to make in them be any real improvement.

"Like the fair plant that from our touch withdraws,
Shrink, mildly fearful, even from applause;

Be all a mother's fondest hope can dream,
And all you are, my charming . . . , seem.
Straight as the fox-glove, ere her bells disclose,
Mild as the maiden-blushing hawthorn blows,
Fair as the fairest of each lovely kind,
Your form shall be the image of your mind;
Your manners shall so true your soul express,
That all shall long to know the worth they guess;
Congenial hearts shall greet with kindred love,
And even sick'ning envy must approve."

R. B.

[These beautiful lines, we have reason to believe, are the production of the lady to whom this letter is addressed.—*Currie.*]

(21.)

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

[This singular letter is now for the first time printed in full, from original document in possession of George Manners, Esq., F.A.S., Fleet Street, London; to whom, for this, and similar favours, hereafter to be acknowledged, we are under the highest obligations. Words and passages, including the strange piece of 'psalmody' originally omitted by Dr. Currie, and hitherto unknown, are enclosed by us in brackets; that their relation to the other parts, and unity of the whole, may be seen. Much has been said of Dr. Currie's editorship. We rejoice to do honour to one who so well deserves it. It is manifest from this solitary instance, that Dr. Currie was both a discriminating, an affectionate, and a very able editor. To have printed this letter in full, at the moment, would have seriously compromised the prospects of the Poet's fatherless family: but to cut the letter down without betraying so large a gap, required the greatest consideration and skill. As Currie prints it, the letter begins abruptly; but the first sentence of the original, containing the word *folio* where no folio was required, would have discovered the deficiency: it was therefore struck out; and all other words referring to the subject were omitted, to prevent the possibility of suspicion and avert inquiry into the matter: yet the letter, as edited by him, with all these deductions, reads perfectly enough. "The most blasphemous party London Newspaper" alluded to by Burns was probably the *Star*, then edited or published by his friend Stuart; in which we are curious to learn whether the "new psalmody," under any signature, or any other anonymous pieces by Burns, ever appeared. Farther remarks we reserve for a place among Notes on Posthumous Works of our Author.]

Ellisland, 4th April, 1789.

[You see, Madam, that I am returned to my folio epistles again.] I no sooner hit on any poetic plan or fancy, but I wish to send it to you; and if knowing and reading them gives half the pleasure to you, that communicating them to you gives to me, I am satisfied.

[As I am not devoutly attached to a certain monarch, I cannot say that my heart run any risk of bursting, on Thursday was se'ennight, with the struggling emotions of gratitude.—G—forgive me for speaking evil of dignities! but I must say, that I look on the whole business as a solemn farce of pageant mummary.—The following are a few stanzas of new Psalmody for that "joyful solemnity," which I sent to a London newspaper, with the date and preface following:—

Kilmarnock, 25th April.

MR. PRINTER,

IN a certain chapel not fifty leagues from the market cross of this good town, the following Stanzas of Psalmody, it is said, were composed for, and devoutly sung on, the late joyful solemnity of the 23rd.

O sing a new song to the L——,
Make, all and every one,
A joyful noise, even for the king
His restoration.

The sons of Belial in the Land
Did set their heads together;
Come, let us sweep them off, said they,
Like an o'erflowing river.

They set their heads together, I say,
They set their heads together;
On right, on left, and every hand,
We saw none to deliver.

Thou madest strong two chosen ones,
To quell the Wicked's pride;
That Young Man great in Issachar,
The burden-bearing tribe.

And him, among the Princes chief
In our Jerusalem,
The Judge that's mighty in thy law,
The man that fears thy name.

Yet they, even they, with all their strength,
Began to faint and fail;
Even as two howling, ravening wolves
To dogs do turn their tail.

Th' ungodly o'er the just prevailed,
For so thou hadst appointed;
That thou might'st greater glory give
Unto thine own anointed.

And now thou hast restored our State,
Pity our Kirk also;
For she by tribulations
Is now brought very low.

Consume that high-place, Patronage,
From off thy holy hill;
And in thy fury burn the book
Even of that man M'Gill.

Now hear our pray'r, accept our song,
And fight thy chosen's battle:
We seek but little, L——, from thee;
Thou kens we get as little.

So much for Psalmody.—You must know that the publisher of one of the most blasphemous party London newspapers is an acquaintance of mine, and as I am a little tinctured with Buff and Blue myself, I now and then help him to a stanza.]

I have [another] poetic whim in my head, which I at present dedicate, or rather inscribe, to The Rt. Honble. Ch. J. Fox, [Esquire]; but how long that fancy may hold, I can't say.—A few of the first lines I have just rough-sketched as follows:

SKETCH.

How Wisdom and Folly meet, mix, and unite;
How Virtue and Vice blend their black and their white;

How Genius, the illustrious father of Fiction,
Confounds Rule and Law, reconciles Contradiction—
I sing: If these mortals, the critics, should bustle,
I care not, not I, let the critics go whistle.

But now for a Patron, whose name and whose glory,
At once may illustrate and honor my story.

Thou first of our orators, first of our wits;
Yet whose parts and acquirements seem just lucky hits;
With knowledge so vast, and with judgment so strong,
No man with the half of 'em e'er could go wrong;
With passions so potent, and fancies so bright,
No man with the half of 'em e'er could go right:
A sorry, poor misbegot son of the Muses,
For using thy name, offers fifty excuses.

* * * * *

[I beg your pardon for troubling you with the inclosed to the Major's tenant before the gate—it is to request him to look me out two milk cows; one for myself, and another for Captain Riddel of Glenriddel, a very obliging neighbor of mine.—John very obligingly offered to do so for me; and I will either serve myself that way, or at Mauchline fair.—It happens on the 20th curt., and the Sunday preceding it I hope to have the honor of assuring you in person how sincerely I am, Madam, your highly obliged and most obedient humble servt.,]

ROBT. BURNS.

[Concluding sentence is printed by Currie with unnecessary abridgment, all reference to the Mauchline Fair being omitted, thus—

"On the 20th current I hope to have the honor of assuring you in person, how sincerely I am—" &c.

Two slight verbal alterations on the text of 'Sketch' have also been made, presumably by him: which liberty we cannot justify. They will be seen by comparing the above with his own, or common editions of poem. (See Notes on Posthumous Works.) The entire document has been endorsed by him thus—

"Psalm on the King's Restoration *not to be printed*. 4th April, 1789. Poem to Fox to be printed. Good Fragments."

Such glimpses into the editorial liberties and arrangements of a very able and judicious man, intrusted with a most laborious and difficult task, are to ourselves extremely interesting.]

(22.)

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Ellisland, 21st June, 1789.

DEAR MADAM,

WILL you take the effusions, the miserable effusions of low spirits, just as they flow from their bitter spring? I know not of any particular cause for this worst of all my foes besetting me; but for some time my soul has been beclouded with a thickening atmosphere of evil imaginations and gloomy presages.

Monday Evening.

I have just heard Mr. Kirkpatrick give a sermon. He is a man famous for his benevolence, and I revere him; but from such ideas of my Creator, good Lord deliver me! Religion, my honored friend, is surely a simple business, as it equally concerns the ignorant and the learned, the poor and the rich. That there is an incomprehensibly Great Being, to whom I

owe my existence, and that he must be intimately acquainted with the operations and progress of the internal machinery, and consequent outward deportment of this creature which he has made; these are, I think, self-evident propositions. That there is a real and eternal distinction between virtue and vice, and consequently, that I am an accountable creature; that from the seeming nature of the human mind, as well as from the evident imperfection, nay, positive injustice, in the administration of affairs, both in the natural and moral worlds, there must be a retributive scene of existence beyond the grave; must, I think, be allowed by every one who will give himself a moment's reflection. I will go farther, and affirm, that from the sublimity, excellence, and purity of his doctrine and precepts, unparalleled by all the aggregated wisdom and learning of many preceding ages, though, *to appearance*, he himself was the obscurest and most illiterate of our species; therefore, Jesus Christ was from God. * * *

Whatever mitigates the woes, or increases the happiness of others, this is my criterion of goodness; and whatever injures society at large, or any individual in it, this is my measure of iniquity.

What think you, Madam, of my creed? I trust that I have said nothing that will lessen me in the eye of one, whose good opinion I value almost next to the approbation of my own mind.

R. B.

(23.)

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Ellisland, 6th Sept. 1789.

DEAR MADAM,

I HAVE mentioned in my last my appointment to the Excise, and the birth of little Frank; who, by the bye, I trust will be no discredit to the honorable name of Wallace, as he has a fine manly countenance, and a figure that might do credit to a little fellow two months older; and likewise an excellent good temper, though when he pleases he has a pipe, only not quite so loud as the horn that his immortal namesake blew as a signal to take out the pin of Stirling bridge.

I had some time ago an epistle, part poetic, and part prosaic, from your poetess, Mrs. J. Little, a very ingenious, but modest composition.* I should have written her as she requested, but for the hurry of this new business. I have heard of her and her compositions in this country; and I am happy to add, always to the honor of her character. The fact is, I know not well how to write to her: I should sit down to a sheet of paper that I knew not how to stain. I am no dab at fine-drawn letter-writing; and, except when prompted by friendship or gratitude, or, which happens extremely rarely, inspired by the Muse (I know not her name) that presides over epistolary writing, I sit down, when necessitated to write, as I would sit down to beat hemp.

Some parts of your letter of the 20th August, struck me with the most melancholy concern for the state of your mind at present. * * *

Would I could write you a letter of comfort! I would sit down to it with as much pleasure, as I would to write an epic

poem of my own composition that should equal the *Iliad*. Religion, my dear friend, is the true comfort! A strong persuasion in a future state of existence; a proposition so obviously probable, that, setting revelation aside, every nation and people, so far as investigation has reached, for at least near four thousand years, have, in some mode or other, firmly believed it. In vain would we reason and pretend to doubt. I have myself done so to a very daring pitch; but, when I reflected, that I was opposing the most ardent wishes, and the most darling hopes of good men, and flying in the face of all human belief, in all ages, I was shocked at my own conduct.

I know not whether I have ever sent you the following lines, or if you have ever seen them; but it is one of my favorite quotations, which I keep constantly by me in my progress through life, in the language of the book of Job,

"Against the day of battle and of war"—

spoken of religion :

"'Tis this, my friend, that streaks our morning bright,
'Tis this that gilds the horror of our night.
When wealth forsakes us, and when friends are few,
When friends are faithless, or when foes pursue;
'Tis this that wards the blow, or stills the smart,
Disarms affliction, or repels his dart;
Within the breast bids purest raptures rise,
Bids smiling conscience spread her cloudless skies."

I have been very busy with *Zeluco*. The Doctor is so obliging as to request my opinion of it; and I have been revolving in my mind some kind of criticisms on novel-writing, but it is a depth beyond my research. I shall however digest my thoughts on the subject as well as I can. *Zeluco* is a most sterling performance.

Farewell! *A Dieu, le bon Dieu, je vous commande.*

R. B.

* [See conclusion of Special Correspondence.]

(24.)

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Ellisland, 13th December, 1789.

MANY thanks, dear Madam, for your sheet-full of rhymes. Though at present I am below the veriest prose, yet from you every thing pleases. I am groaning under the miseries of a diseased nervous system; a system, the state of which is most conducive to our happiness—or the most productive of our misery. For now near three weeks I have been so ill with a nervous head-ache, that I have been obliged to give up for a time my Excise-books, being scarce able to lift my head, much less to ride once a week over ten muir parishes. What is man!—To-day in the luxuriance of health, exulting in the enjoyment of existence; in a few days, perhaps in a few hours, loaded with conscious painful being, counting the tardy pace of the lingering moments by the repercussions of anguish, and refusing or denied a comforter. Day follows night, and night comes after day, only to curse him with life which gives him no pleasure; and yet the awful, dark termination of that life is a something at which he recoils.

"Tell us, ye dead; will none of you in pity
Disclose the secret.
What 'tis you are, and we must shortly be?
'tis no matter:
A little time will make us learn'd as you are."

Can it be possible, that when I resign this frail, feverish being, I shall still find myself in conscious existence! When the last gasp of agony has announced that I am no more to those that knew me, and the few who loved me; when the cold, stiffened, unconscious, ghastly corse is resigned into the earth, to be the prey of unsightly reptiles, and to become in time a trodden clod, shall I yet be warm in life, seeing and seen, enjoying and enjoyed? Ye venerable sages and holy flamens, is there probability in your conjectures, truth in your stories, of another world beyond death; or are they all alike, baseless visions, and fabricated fables? If there is another life, it must only be for the just, the benevolent, the amiable, and the humane; what a flattering idea, then, is a world to come! Would to God I as firmly believed it, as I ardently wish it! There I should meet an aged parent, now at rest from the many buffetings of an evil world, against which he so long and so bravely struggled. There should I meet the friend, the disinterested friend of my early life; the man who rejoiced to see me, because he loved me and could serve me.—Muir, thy weaknesses were the aberrations of human nature, but thy heart glowed with every thing generous, manly and noble; and if ever emanation from the All-good Being animated a human form, it was thine! There should I, with speechless agony of rapture, again recognize my lost, my ever dear Mary! whose bosom was fraught with truth, honor, constancy, and love.

My Mary, dear departed shade!
Where is thy place of heavenly rest?
Seest thou thy lover lowly laid?
Hear'st thou the groans that rend his breast?

Jesus Christ, thou amiablest of characters! I trust thou art no impostor, and that thy revelation of blissful scenes of existence beyond death and the grave, is not one of the many impositions which time after time have been palmed on credulous mankind. I trust that in thee "shall all the families of the earth be blessed," by being yet connected together in a better world, where every tie that bound heart to heart, in this state of existence, shall be, far beyond our present conceptions, more endearing.

I am a good deal inclined to think with those who maintain, that what are called nervous affections are in fact diseases of the mind. I cannot reason, I cannot think; and but to you I would not venture to write any thing above an order to a cobbler. You have felt too much of the ills of life not to sympathize with a diseased wretch, who is* impaired more than half of any faculties he possessed. Your goodness will excuse this distracted scrawl, which the writer dare scarcely read, and which he would throw into the fire, were he able to write any thing better, or indeed any thing at all.

Rumour told me something of a son of yours, who was returned from the East or West Indies. If you have gotten news of James or Anthony, it was cruel in you not to let

me know; as I promise you on the sincerity of a man, who is weary of one world, and anxious about another, that scarce any thing could give me so much pleasure as to hear of any good thing befalling my honored friend.

If you have a minute's leisure, take up your pen in pity to *le pauvre miserable*.

R. B.

[Thus distinctly in Currie. In all other editions we have seen, the phrase has been altered, on what authority we know not, to '*has impaired*', which gives an entirely different and self-incriminating sense to the whole passage; for which there is no justification, moral or circumstantial, that we are aware of, and which we have no right, therefore, to assume the writer intended to convey.]

(25.)

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Ellisland, 25th January, 1790.

It has been owing to unremitting hurry of business that I have not written to you, Madam, long ere now. My health is greatly better, and I now begin once more to share in satisfaction and enjoyment with the rest of my fellow-creatures.

Many thanks, my much-esteemed friend, for your kind letters; but why will you make me run the risk of being contemptible and mercenary in my own eyes? When I pique myself on my independent spirit, I hope it is neither poetic licence, nor poetic rant; and I am so flattered with the honor you have done me, in making me your compeer in friendship and friendly correspondence, that I cannot without pain, and a degreee of mortification, be reminded of the real inequality between our situations.

Most sincerely do I rejoice with you, dear Madam, in the good news of Anthony. Not only your anxiety about his fate, but my own esteem for such a noble, warm-hearted, manly young fellow, in the little I had of his acquaintance, has interested me deeply in his fortunes.

Falconer, the unfortunate author of the "Shipwreck," which you so much admire, is no more. After weathering the dreadful catastrophe he so feelingly describes in his poem, and after weathering many hard gales of fortune, he went to the bottom with the Aurora frigate!

I forget what part of Scotland had the honor of giving him birth; but he was the son of obscurity and misfortune.* He was one of those daring adventurous spirits which Scotland, beyond any other country, is remarkable for producing. Little does the fond mother think, as she hangs delighted over the sweet little leech at her bosom, where the poor fellow may hereafter wander, and what may be his fate. I remember a stanza in an old Scottish ballad, which, notwithstanding its rude simplicity, speaks feelingly to the heart:

"Little did my mother think,
That day she cradled me,
What land I was to travel in,
Or what death I should die!"

Old Scottish songs are, you know, a favourite study and pursuit of mine, and now I am on that subject, allow me to give you two stanzas of another old simple ballad, which I am

sure will please you. The catastrophe of the piece is a poor ruined female, lamenting her fate. She concludes with this pathetic wish :—

"O that my father had ne'er on me smil'd;
O that my mother had ne'er to me sung!
O that my cradle had never been rock'd;
But that I had died when I was young!

O that the grave it were my bed;
My blankets were my winding sheet;
The clocks and the worms my bedfellows a';
And O sae sound as I should sleep!"

I do not remember in all my reading, to have met with any thing more truly the language of misery, than the exclamation in the last line. Misery is like love; to speak its language truly, the author must have felt it.

I am every day expecting the doctor to give your little godson† the small-pox. They are *rife* in the country, and I tremble for his fate. By the way, I cannot help congratulating you on his looks and spirit. Every person who sees him acknowledges him to be the finest, handsomest child he has ever seen. I am myself delighted with the manly swell of his little chest, and a certain miniature dignity in the carriage of his head, and the glance of his fine black eye, which promise the undaunted gallantry of an independent mind.

I thought to have sent you some rhymes, but time forbids. I promise you poetry until you are tired of it, next time I have the honor of assuring you how truly I am, &c.

R. B.

*It may be mentioned, that he was a native of one of the towns on the coast of Fife; and that his parents, who had suffered some misfortunes, removed to one of the sea-ports of England, where they both died soon after of an epidemic fever, leaving poor Falconer, then a boy, forlorn and destitute. In consequence of which he entered on board a man-of-war. The last circumstances are, however, less certain.—*Currie.*

†Francis Wallace, second son of Poet.]

(26.)

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Ellisland, 10th April, 1790.

I HAVE just now, my ever honored friend, enjoyed a very high luxury, in reading a paper of the Lounger. You know my national prejudices. I had often read and admired the Spectator, Adventurer, Rambler, and World; but still with a certain regret, that they were so thoroughly and entirely English. Alas! have I often said to myself, what are all the boasted advantages which my country reaps from the Union, that can counterbalance the annihilation of her independence, and even her very name! I often repeat that couplet of my favourite poet, Goldsmith—

"——States of native liberty possest,
Tho' very poor, may yet be very blest."

Nothing can reconcile me to the common terms, "English ambassador, English court," &c. And I am out of all patience to see that equivocal character, Hastings, impeached by "the

Commons of England." Tell me, my friend, is this weak prejudice? I believe in my conscience such ideas as "my country; her independence; her honor; the illustrious names that mark the history of my native land;" &c.—I believe these, among your *men of the world*, men who in fact guide for the most part and govern our world, are looked on as so many modifications of wrongheadedness. They know the use of bawling out such terms, to rouse or lead THE RABBLE; but for their own private use, with almost all the *able statesmen* that ever existed, or now exist, when they talk of right and wrong, they only mean proper and improper; and their measure of conduct is, not what they ought, but what they DARE. For the truth of this I shall not ransack the history of nations, but appeal to one of the ablest judges of men, and himself one of the ablest men, that ever lived—the celebrated Earl of Chesterfield. In fact, a man who could thoroughly control his vices whenever they interfered with his interests, and who could completely put on the appearance of every virtue as often as it suited his purposes, is, on the Stanhopean plan, the *perfect man*; a man to lead nations. But are great abilities, complete without a flaw, and polished without a blemish, the standard of human excellence? This is certainly the staunch opinion of *men of the world*; but I call on honor, virtue, and worth, to give the stygian doctrine a loud negative! However, this must be allowed, that, if you abstract from man the idea of an existence beyond the grave, then, the true measure of human conduct is, *proper* and *improper*: virtue and vice, as dispositions of the heart, are, in that case, of scarcely the same import and value to the world at large, as harmony and discord in the modifications of sound; and a delicate sense of honor, like a nice ear for music, though it may sometimes give the possessor an ecstasy unknown to the coarser organs of the herd, yet, considering the harsh gratings, and inharmonic jars, in this ill-tuned state of being, it is odds but the individual would be as happy, and certainly would be as much respected by the true judges of society as it would then stand, without either a good ear or a good heart.

You must know I have just met with the Mirror and Lounger for the first time, and I am quite in raptures with them; I should be glad to have your opinion of some of the papers. The one I have just read, Lounger, No. 61, has cost me more honest tears than any thing I have read of a long time. Mackenzie has been called the Addison of the Scots, and in my opinion, Addison would not be hurt at the comparison. If he has not Addison's exquisite humour, he as certainly outdoes him in the tender and the pathetic. His *Man of Feeling* (but I am not counsel learned in the laws of criticism) I estimate as the first performance in its kind I ever saw. From what book, moral or even pious, will the susceptible young mind receive impressions more congenial to humanity and kindness, generosity and benevolence; in short, mere of all that ennobles the soul to herself, or endears her to others—than from the simple affecting tale of poor Harley.

Still, with all my admiration of Mackenzie's writings, I do not know if they are the fittest reading for a young man who is about to set out, as the phrase is, to make his way into life. Do not you think, Madam, that among the few favoured of

heaven in the structure of their minds (for such there certainly are), there may be a purity, a tenderness, a dignity, an elegance of soul, which are of no use, nay, in some degree, absolutely disqualifying for the truly important business of making a man's way into life? If I am not much mistaken, my gallant young friend, A ******, is very much under these disqualifications; and for the young females of a family I could mention, well may they excite parental solicitude, for I, a common acquaintance, or as my vanity will have it, an humble friend, have often trembled for a turn of mind which may render them eminently happy—or peculiarly miserable.

I have been manufacturing some verses lately; but as I have got the most hurried season of excise business over, I hope to have more leisure to transcribe any thing that may show how much I have the honor to be, Madam,

Yours, &c.

R. B.

(27.)

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

8th August, 1790.

DEAR MADAM,

AFTER a long day's toil, plague, and care, I sit down to write to you. Ask me not why I have delayed it so long? It was owing to hurry, indolence, and fifty other things; in short to anything—but forgetfulness of *la plus aimable de son sexe*. By the bye, you are indebted your best courtesy to me for this last compliment; as I pay it from my sincere conviction of its truth—a quality rather rare in compliments of these grinning, bowing, scraping times.

Well, I hope writing to *you* will ease a little my troubled soul. Sorely has it been bruised to-day! A ci-devant friend of mine, and an intimate acquaintance of yours, has given my feelings a wound that I perceive will gangrene dangerously ere it cure. He has wounded my pride!

R. B.

(28.)

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Ellisland, November, 1790.

"As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country."

Fate has long owed me a letter of good news from you, in return for the many tidings of sorrow which I have received. In this instance I most cordially obey the apostle—"Rejoice with them that do rejoice"—for me, *to sing* for joy, is no new thing; but *to preach* for joy, as I have done in the commencement of this epistle, is a pitch of extravagant rapture to which I never rose before.

I read your letter—I literally jumped for joy—How could such a mercurial creature as a poet lumpishly keep his seat on the receipt of the best news from his best friend? I seized my gilt-headed Wangee rod, an instrument indispensably necessary in my left hand, in the moment of inspiration and

rapture; and stride, stride—quick and quicker—out skipt I among the broomy banks of Nith to muse over my joy by retail. To keep within the bounds of prose was impossible. Mrs. Little's is a more elegant, but not a more sincere compliment to the sweet little fellow, than I, extempore almost, poured out to him in the following verses:—

Sweet flow'ret, pledge o' meikle love
And ward o' mony a prayer,
What heart o' stane wad thou na move,
Sae helpless, sweet, an' fair.
November hirples o'er the lea
Chill on thy lovely form;
But gane, alas! the shelt'ring tree
Should shield thee frae the storm.

* * * * *

I am much flattered by your approbation of my *Tam o' Shanter*, which you express in your former letter; though, by the bye, you load me in that said letter with accusations heavy and many; to all of which I plead, *not guilty!* Your book is, I hear, on the road to reach me. As to printing of poetry, when you prepare it for the press, you have only to spell it right, and place the capital letters properly: as to the punctuation, the printers do that themselves.

I have a copy of *Tam o' Shanter* ready to send you by the first opportunity; it is too heavy to send by post.

I heard of Mr. Corbet lately. He, in consequence of your recommendation, is most zealous to serve me. Please favour me soon with an account of your good folks; if Mrs. H. is recovering, and the young gentleman doing well.

R. B.

(29.)

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Ellisland, 7th [April], 1791.

WHEN I tell you, Madam, that by a fall, not from my horse, but with my horse, I have been a cripple some time, and that this is the first day my arm and hand have been able to serve me in writing; you will allow that it is too good an apology for my seemingly ungrateful silence. I am now getting better, and am able to rhyme a little, which implies some tolerable ease; as I cannot think that the most poetic genius is able to compose on the rack.

I do not remember if ever I mentioned to you my having an idea of composing an elegy on the late Miss Burnet, of Monboddo. I had the honor of being pretty well acquainted with her, and have seldom felt so much at the loss of an acquaintance, as when I heard that so amiable and accomplished a piece of God's works was no more. I have, as yet, gone no farther than the following fragment, of which please let me have your opinion. You know that elegy is a subject so much exhausted, that any new idea on the business is not to be expected: 'tis well if we can place an old idea in a new light. How far I have succeeded as to this last, you will judge from what follows.

[Here follows the Elegy, for which see Posthumous Works.]

I have proceeded no further.

Your kind letter, with your kind *remembrance* of your godson, came safe. This last, Madam, is scarcely what my pride can bear. As to the little fellow, he is, partiality apart, the finest boy I have of a long time seen. He is now seventeen months old, has the small pox and measles over, has cut several teeth, and never yet had a grain of doctor's drugs in his bowels.

I am truly happy to hear the "little floweret" is blooming so fresh and fair, and that the "mother plant" is rather recovering her drooping head. Soon and well may her "cruel wounds" be healed! I have written thus far with a good deal of difficulty. When I get a little abler you shall hear farther from,

Madam, yours,

R. B.

(30.)

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Ellisland, 11th April, 1791.

I AM once more able, my honored friend, to return you, with my own hand, thanks for the many instances of your friendship, and particularly for your kind anxiety in this last disaster that my evil genius had in store for me. However, life is chequered—joy and sorrow—for on Saturday morning last, Mrs. Burns made me a present of a fine boy; rather stouter, but not so handsome as your godson was at his time of life. Indeed I look on your little namesake to be my *chef d'œuvre* in that species of manufacture, as I look on Tam o' Shanter to be my standard performance in the poetical line. 'Tis true, both the one and the other discover a spice of roguish wagery, that might perhaps be as well spared; but then they also show, in my opinion, a force of genius and a finishing polish, that I despair of ever excelling. Mrs. Burns is getting stout again, and laid as lustily about her to-day at breakfast, as a reaper from the corn-ridge. That is the peculiar privilege and blessing of our hale, sprightly damsels, that are bred among the *hay and heather*. We cannot hope for that highly polished mind, that charming delicacy of soul, which is found among the female world in the more elevated stations of life, and which is certainly by far the most bewitching charm in the famous cestus of Venus. It is indeed such an inestimable treasure, that where it can be had in its native heavenly purity, unstained by some one or other of the many shades of affectation, and unalloyed by some one or other of the many species of caprice, I declare to Heaven, I should think it cheaply purchased at the expense of every other earthly good! But as this angelic creature is, I am afraid, extremely rare in any station and rank of life, and totally denied to such a humble one as mine, we meaner mortals must put up with the next rank of female excellence—as fine a figure and face we can produce as any rank of life whatever; rustic, native grace; unaffected modesty, and unsullied purity; nature's mother-wit, and the rudiments of taste; a simplicity of soul, unsuspicuous of, because unacquainted with,

crooked ways of a selfish, interested, disingenuous world; and the dearest charm of all the rest, a yielding sweetness of disposition, and a generous warmth of heart, grateful for love on our part, and ardently glowing with a more than equal return: these, with a healthy frame, a sound, vigorous constitution, which your higher ranks can scarcely ever hope to enjoy, are the charms of lovely woman in my humble walk of life.

This is the greatest effort my broken arm has yet made. Do let me hear, by first post, how *cher petit Monsieur** comes on with his small-pox. May almighty goodness preserve and restore him!

R. B.

* [The 'little floweret'—Madame Henri's son, and grandson of Mrs. Dunlop.]

(31.)

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Ellisland, 17th December, 1791.

MANY thanks to you, Madam, for your good news respecting the little floweret and the mother-plant. I hope my poetic prayers have been heard, and will be answered up to the warmest sincerity of their fullest extent; and then Mrs. Henri will find her little darling the representative of his late parent, in everything but his abridged existence.

I have just finished the following song, which to a lady the descendant of Wallace—and many heroes of his truly illustrious line—and herself the mother of several soldiers, needs neither preface nor apology.

Scene—*A field of battle—time of the day, evening: the wounded and dying of the victorious army are supposed to join in the following*

SONG OF DEATH.

Farewell, thou fair day, thou green earth, and ye skies
Now gay with the bright setting sun;
Farewell, loves and friendships, ye dear, tender ties—
Our race of existence is run!

* * * * *

The circumstance that gave rise to the foregoing verses was, looking over with a musical friend M'Donald's collection of Highland airs, I was struck with one, an Isle of Skye tune, entitled "Oran an Aoig," or "The Song of Death," to the measure of which I have adapted my stanzas. I have of late composed two or three other little pieces, which, ere yon full-orbed moon, whose broad impudent face now stares at old mother earth all night, shall have shrunk into a modest crescent, just peeping forth at dewy dawn, I shall find an hour to transcribe for you. *A Dieu je vous commande.*

R. B.

(32.)

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Annan Water Foot, 22nd August, 1792.

Do not blame me for it, Madam;—my own conscience, hacknied and weatherbeaten as it is, in watching and reprobating my vagaries, follies, indolence, &c., has continued to blame and punish me sufficiently.

* * * * *

Do you think it possible, my dear and honored friend, that I could be so lost to gratitude for many favors, to esteem for much worth, and to the honest, kind, pleasurable tie of, now, old acquaintance, and I hope and am sure, of progressive, increasing friendship—as, for a single day, not to think of you—to ask the Fates what they are doing and about to do with my much-loved friend and her wide-scattered connexions, and to beg of them to be as kind to you and yours as they possibly can?

Apropos (though how it is apropos, I have not leisure to explain), do you not know that I am almost in love with an acquaintance of yours?—Almost! said I—I am in love, souse! over head and ears, deep as the most unfathomable abyss of the boundless ocean; but the word Love, owing to the *intermingledoms* of the good and the bad, the pure and the impure, in this world, being rather an equivocal term for expressing one's sentiments and sensations, I must do justice to the sacred purity of my attachment. Know, then, that the heart-struck awe; the distant humble approach; the delight we should have in gazing upon and listening to a Messenger of Heaven, appearing in all the unspotted purity of his celestial home, among the coarse, polluted, far inferior sons of men, to deliver to them tidings that make their hearts swim in joy, and their imaginations soar in transport—such, so delighting, and so pure, were the emotions of my soul on meeting the other day with Miss Lesley Baillie, your neighbour, at M——. Mr. B. with his two daughters, accompanied by Mr. H. of G., passing through Dumfries a few days ago, on their way to England, did me the honor of calling on me; on which I took my horse (though God knows I could ill spare the time), and accompanied them fourteen or fifteen miles, and dined and spent the day with them. 'Twas about nine, I think, when I left them; and, riding home, I composed the following ballad, of which you will probably think you have a dear bargain, as it will cost you another groat of postage. You must know that there is an old ballad beginning with—

“My bonie Lizzie Baillie
I'll rowe thee in my plaidie,” &c.

So I parodied it as follows, which is literally the first copy, “unanointed, unanneal'd,” as Hamlet says.—

O saw ye bonie Lesley
As she gaed o'er the border?
She's game like Alexander,
To spread her conquests farther.
* * * *

So much for ballads. I regret that you are gone to the east country, as I am to be in Ayrshire in about a fortnight. This world of ours, notwithstanding it has many good things in it, yet it has ever had this curse, that two or three people who would be the happier the oftener they met together, are, almost

without exception, always so placed as never to meet but once or twice a-year; which, considering the few years of a man's life, is a very great “evil under the sun,” which I do not recollect that Solomon has mentioned in his catalogue of the miseries of man. I hope and believe that there is a state of existence beyond the grave, where the worthy of this life will renew their former intimacies, with this endearing addition, that, “we meet to part no more.”

* * * * *

“Tell us, ye dead,
Will none of you in pity disclose the secret,
What 'tis you are, and we must shortly be?” *

A thousand times have I made this apostrophe to the departed sons of men, but not one of them has ever thought fit to answer the question. “O that some courteous ghost would blab it out!” but it cannot be: you and I, my friend, must make the experiment by ourselves and for ourselves. However, I am so convinced that an unshaken faith in the doctrines of religion is not only necessary by making us better men, but also by making us happier men, that I shall take every care that your little godson, and every little creature that shall call me father, shall be taught them.

So ends this heterogeneous letter, written at this wild place of the world, in the intervals of my labour of discharging a vessel of rum from Antigua.

R. B.

* [Blair's “Grave”—already quoted by our Author, in slightly different form, Letter (24).]

(33.)

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Dumfries, 24th September, 1792.

I HAVE this moment, my dear Madam, yours of the twenty-third. All your other kind reproaches, your news, &c., are out of my head when I read and think on Mrs. H[enri]’s situation. Good God! a heart-wounded helpless young woman—in a strange, foreign land, and that land convulsed with every horror that can harrow the human feelings—sick-looking, longing for a comforter, but finding none—a mother’s feelings, too—but it is too much: he who wounded (he only can) may He heal!

* * * * *

I wish the Farmer great joy of his new acquisition to his family. * * * * * I cannot say that I give him joy of his life as a farmer. 'Tis, as a farmer paying a dear, unconscionable rent, a *cursed life!* As to a laird farming his own property; sowing his own corn in hope; and reaping it, in spite of brittle weather, in gladness; knowing that none can say unto him, “what dost thou?”—fattening his herds; shearing his flocks; rejoicing at Christmas; and begetting sons and daughters, until he be the venerated, grey-haired leader of a little tribe—'tis a heavenly life! but Devil take the life of reaping the fruits that another must eat.

Well, your kind wishes will be gratified, as to seeing me when I make my Ayrshire visit. I cannot leave Mrs. B. until her nine months' race is run, which may perhaps be in three or four weeks. She, too, seems determined to make me the patriarchal leader of a band. However, if Heaven will

* D

be so obliging as let me have them in the proportion of three boys to one girl, I shall be so much the more pleased. I hope, if I am spared with them, to show a set of boys that will do honor to my cares and name; but I am not equal to the task of rearing girls. Besides, I am too poor; a girl should always have a fortune. Apropos, your little godson is thriving charmingly, but is a very devil. He, though two years younger, has completely mastered his brother. Robert is indeed the mildest, gentlest creature I ever saw. He has a most surprising memory, and is quite the pride of his school-master.

You know how readily we get into prattle upon a subject dear to our heart: you can excuse it. God bless you and yours!

R. B.

(34.)

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Dumfries, October, 1792.

[Supposed to have been written on death of Madame Henri, her daughter, who died at Muges, Aiguillon, South of France, Sep. 15th, 1792. See foregoing Letter.]

I HAD been from home, and did not receive your letter until my return the other day. What shall I say to comfort you, my much-valued, much-afflicted friend! I can but grieve with you; consolation I have none to offer, except that which religion holds out to the children of affliction—*children of affliction!*—how just the expression! and like every other family, they have matters among them which they hear, see, and feel in a serious, all-important manner, of which the world has not, nor cares to have, any idea. The world looks indifferently on, makes the passing remark, and proceeds to the next novel occurrence.

Alas, Madam! who would wish for many years! What is it but to drag existence until our joys gradually expire, and leave us in a night of misery: like the gloom which blots out the stars one by one, from the face of night, and leaves us, without a ray of comfort, in the howling waste! *

I am interrupted, and must leave off. You shall soon hear from me again.

R. B.

* [When true hearts lie wither'd,
And fond ones are flown,
Oh! who would inhabit
This bleak world alone!—Moore.]

(35.)

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Dumfries, 6th December, 1792.

I SHALL be in Ayrshire, I think, next week; and, if at all possible, I shall certainly, my much-esteemed friend, have the pleasure of visiting at Dunlop-house.

Alas, Madam! how seldom do we meet in this world, that we have reason to congratulate ourselves on accessions of happiness! I have not passed half the ordinary term of an old man's life, and yet I scarcely look over the obituary of a newspaper, that I do not see some names that I have known, and which I, and other acquaintances, little thought to meet

with there so soon. Every other instance of the mortality of our kind makes us cast an anxious look into the dreadful abyss of uncertainty, and shudder with apprehension for our own fate. But of how different an importance are the lives of different individuals? Nay, of what importance is one period of the same life, more than another? A few years ago, I could have lain down in the dust, “careless of the voice of the morning;” and now not a few, and these most helpless individuals, would, on losing me and my exertions, lose both their “staff and shield.” By the way, these helpless ones have lately got an addition; Mrs. B. having given me a fine girl since I wrote you. There is a charming passage in Thomson’s “Edward and Eleanora:”

“The valiant in himself, what can he suffer?
Or what need he regard his single woes?” &c.

As I am got in the way of quotations, I shall give you another from the same piece, peculiarly, alas! too peculiarly apposite, my dear Madam, to your present frame of mind:

“Who so unworthy but may proudly deck him
With his fair-weather virtue, that exults
Glad o'er the summer main? The tempest comes,
The rough winds rage aloud; when from the helm
This virtue shrinks, and in a corner lies
Lamenting—Heavens! if privileged from trial,
How cheap a thing were virtue!”

I do not remember to have heard you mention Thomson’s dramas. I pick up favourite quotations and store them in my mind as ready armour, offensive or defensive, amid the struggle of this turbulent existence. Of these is one, a very favourite one, from his “Alfred:”

“Attach thee firmly to the virtuous deeds
And offices of life; to life itself,
With all its vain and transient joys, sit loose.”

Probably I have quoted some of these to you formerly, as indeed when I write from the heart, I am apt to be guilty of such repetitions. The compass of the heart, in the musical style of expression, is much more bounded than that of the imagination; so the notes of the former are extremely apt to run into one another; but in return for the paucity of its compass, its few notes are much more sweet. I must still give you another quotation, which I am almost sure I have given you before, but I cannot resist the temptation. The subject is religion—speaking of its importance to mankind, the author says,

“‘Tis this, my friend, that streaks our morning bright,”
[&c., as in Letter (23.)]

I see you are in for double postage, so I shall e'en scribble out t’other sheet. We, in this country here, have many alarms of the reforming, or rather the republican spirit, of your part of the kingdom. Indeed we are a good deal in commotion ourselves. For me, I am a placeman, you know; a very humble one indeed, Heaven knows, but still so much so as to gag me. What my private sentiments are, you will find out without an interpreter.

* * * * *

I have taken up the subject in another view, and the other day, for a pretty actress’s benefit-night, I wrote an Address,

which I will give on the other page, called "The Rights of Woman:"

While Europe's eye is fixed on mighty things,

[See Posthumous Works.]

I shall have the honor of receiving your criticisms in person at Dunlop.

R. B.

(36.) TO MRS. DUNLOP.

[FIRST HALF.]

[*Dumfries*,] Dec. 31, 1792.

DEAR MADAM,

A HURRY of business, thrown in heaps by my absence, has until now prevented my returning my grateful acknowledgments to the good family of Dunlop, and you in particular, for that hospitable kindness which rendered the four days I spent under that genial roof, four of the pleasantest I ever enjoyed.—Alas, my dearest friend! how few and fleeting are those things we call pleasures! On my road to Ayrshire, I spent a night with a friend whom I much valued; a man whose days promised to be many; and on Saturday last we laid him in the dust!

Jan. 2, 1793.

I HAVE just received yours of the 30th, and feel much for your situation. However, I heartily rejoice in your prospect of recovery from that vile jaundice. As to myself, I am better, though not quite free of my complaint.—You must not think, as you seem to insinuate, that in my way of life I want exercise. Of that I have enough; but occasional hard drinking is the devil to me. Against this I have again and again bent my resolution, and have greatly succeeded. Taverns I have totally abandoned: it is the private parties in the family way, among the hard-drinking gentlemen of this country, that do me the mischief—but even this I have more than half given over.

Mr. Corbet can be of little service to me at present; at least I should be shy of applying. I cannot possibly be settled as a supervisor, for several years. I must wait the rotation of the list, and there are twenty names before mine.—I might indeed get a job of officiating, where a settled supervisor was ill, or aged; but that hauls me from my family, as I could not remove them on such an uncertainty. Besides, some envious, malicious devil has raised a little demur on my political principles, and I wish to let that matter settle before I offer myself too much in the eye of my supervisors. I have set, henceforth, a seal on my lips, as to these unlucky politics; but to you, I must breathe my sentiments. In this, as in every thing else, I shall shew the undisguised emotions of my soul. War I deprecate: misery and ruin to thousands are in the blast that announces the destructive demon. But

* * * * *

[The remainder of this letter has been torn away by some barbarous hand.—*Cromek*. I can have no doubt that it was torn away by one of the kindest hands in the world—that of Mrs. Dunlop herself.—*Lockhart*. For explanation of difficulty see following note.]

[SECOND HALF.]

5th January, 179[3].*

You see my hurried life, Madam: I can only command starts of time; however, I am glad of one thing; since I finished the other sheet, the political blast that threatened my welfare is overblown. I have corresponded with Commissioner Graham, for the board had made me the subject of their animadversions; and now I have the pleasure of informing you, that all is set to rights in that quarter. Now as to these informers, may the devil be let loose to — but hold! I was praying most fervently in my last sheet, and I must not so soon fall a-swearling in this.

Alas! how little do the wantonly or idly officious think what mischief they do by their malicious insinuations, indirect impertinence, or thoughtless blabbings. What a difference there is in intrinsic worth, candor, benevolence, generosity, kindness,—in all the charities and all the virtues, between one class of human beings and another. For instance, the amiable circle I so lately mixed with in the hospitable hall of Dunlop, their generous hearts—their uncontaminated dignified minds—their informed and polished understandings—what a contrast, when compared—if such comparing were not downright sacrilege—with the soul of the miscreant who can deliberately plot the destruction of an honest man that never offended him, and with a grin of satisfaction see the unfortunate being, his faithful wife, and prattling innocents, turned over to beggary and ruin!

Your cup, my dear Madam, arrived safe. I had two worthy fellows dining with me the other day, when I, with great formality, produced my whigmeerie cup, and told them that it had been a family-piece among the descendants of Sir William Wallace. This roused such an enthusiasm that they insisted on bumpering the punch round in it; and by and by, never did your great ancestor lay a *Suthron* more completely to rest, than for a time did your cup my two friends. Apropos, this is the season of wishing. May God bless you, my dear friend, and bless me, the humblest and sincerest of your friends, by granting you yet many returns of the season! May all good things attend you and yours, wherever they are scattered over the earth!

R. B.

* [This letter is given by Currie as of date 1792, which was possibly the actual date in manuscript: but we entirely concur with Mr. Chambers, who was the first, so far as we are aware, to point out the fact—that it must be a mistake. The letter obviously refers to what took place of a painful character in December 1792, and therefore could not have been written a year before: but in the haste and excitement of the writer, thinking of what had just occurred in the end of —92, a wrong figure might easily be put down at the beginning of next year.

But there is another fact, of curious interest, which seems entirely to have escaped Mr. Chambers—viz.: that this so-called letter is but the *second half* of another letter, and that the *first half* is the letter which goes immediately before. A very slight comparison of the two fragments will demonstrate this. The first half begins but does not *end*, the second half ends but does not *begin*; the dates are continuous at short intervals (too short to allow another letter to the same person to be written between them), and the subject of both is the same, with a little additional satisfactory news obtained in the meantime; the second half refers to a "last sheet" which has never elsewhere been seen, unless the sheet that goes before is the sheet in question; and finally, the tenor, the topics, and very terms—the reiteration of haste and hurry—in both fragments, are the same. The history of both is natural and consistent: The second sheet, having a subordinate date of its own, with Mrs. Dunlop's address on the outside, was so far perfect, and, above all, having no treason, would be handed without commentary to Dr. Currie, and printed accordingly. But the first sheet (what the writer calls "the other sheet," or "my last sheet," in relation to this) had most probably

some dangerous political complaints or confessions of his own, or strange enough prayers by him about the issue of the *war*, at the end of it. These the affectionate lady would cautiously tear off, and hide the rest of the sheet, to prevent mischief. This mutilated sheet, with a beginning but no end, falls by and by into Cromek's hands, who cannot comprehend the deficiency—and it also gets printed in its own time and way. From which date till the present moment these fragments have been regarded as two distinct letters, being in reality but the first and second parts of one.

Mr. Chambers seems to have been misled by the formal signature in Cunningham's Edition, of "R. B." to the first fragment. This, we need hardly state, is a mere fabrication of Cunningham's, who supplied deficiencies of that kind without distress. There is no signature at all in Cromek, who first printed the letter; and there could not be: for even if the letter had been an independent document, the conclusion, according to his own account, had been "barbarously" torn away. The whole document, in short, has been one of those "progressive" letters which our Author kept lying before him, to eke out and fill up by degrees for Mrs. Dunlop's amusement or consolation, as opportunity occurred; and we have great pleasure now in presenting it for the first time, as far as circumstances will permit, in its own entirety. (Similar Letters (38.) and (39.), with corresponding dates, occur at same period in 1794, and 1795.) What the political sentiments or prayers were, which he "breathed" in his correspondent's ear, we can only now conjecture; nor will it be very difficult, in part: but absolute certainty on the subject she has herself removed for ever. Compare Letter (35.) at * * * *, also "The Rights of Woman."

(37.)

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Castle Douglas, 25th June, 1794.

HERE in a solitary inn, in a solitary village, am I set by myself, to amuse my brooding fancy as I may.—Solitary confinement, you know, is Howard's favourite idea of reclaiming sinners; so let me consider by what fatality it happens that I have so long been [so] exceeding sinful as to neglect the correspondence of the most valued friend I have on earth. To tell you that I have been in poor health will not be excuse enough, though it is true. I am afraid that I am about to suffer for the follies of my youth. My medical friends threaten me with a flying gout; but I trust they are mistaken.

I am just going to trouble your critical patience with the first sketch of a stanza I have been framing as I passed along the road. The subject is *Liberty*. You know, my honored friend, how dear the theme is to me. I design it an irregular Ode for General Washington's birth-day. After having mentioned the degeneracy of other kingdoms I come to Scotland thus:

Thee, Caledonia, thy wild heaths among,
Thee, famed for martial deed, and sacred song,

[See Posthumous Works—as in Cromek.]

You will probably have another scrawl from me in a stage or two.

R. B.

(38.)

TO MRS. DUNLOP,
IN LONDON.*Dumfries, 20th December, 1794.*

I HAVE been prodigiously disappointed in this London journey of yours. In the first place, when your last to me reached Dumfries, I was in the country, and did not return until too late to answer your letter; in the next place, I thought you would certainly take this route; and now I know not what is

become of you, or whether this may reach you at all. God grant that it may find you and yours in prospering health and good spirits! Do let me hear from you the soonest possible.

As I hope to get a frank from my friend Captain Miller, I shall, every leisure hour, take up the pen, and gossip away whatever comes first, prose or poesy, sermon or song. In this last article I have abounded of late. I have often mentioned to you a superb publication of Scottish songs which is making its appearance in your great metropolis, and where I have the honor to preside over the Scottish verse, as no less a personage than Peter Pindar does over the English. I wrote the following for a favorite air.

[This letter having been misplaced by Dr. Currie as of 1795, the song here referred to cannot now be easily identified—unless it be "My Nanie's awa."]

December 29th.

Since I began this letter, I have been appointed to act in the capacity of supervisor here, and I assure you, what with the load of business, and what with that business being new to me, I could scarcely have commanded ten minutes to have spoken to you, had you been in town, much less to have written you an epistle. This appointment is only temporary, and during the illness of the present incumbent; but I look forward to an early period when I shall be appointed in full form: a consummation devoutly to be wished! My political sins seem to be forgiven me.

This is the season (New-year's-day is now my date) of wishing; and mine are most fervently offered up for you! May life to you be a positive blessing while it lasts, for your own sake; and that it may yet be greatly prolonged, is my wish for my own sake, and for the sake of the rest of your friends! What a transient business is life! Very lately I was a boy; but t'other day I was a young man; and I already begin to feel the rigid fibre and stiffening joints of old age coming fast o'er my frame. With all my follies of youth, and I fear, a few vices of manhood, still I congratulate myself on having had, in early days, religion strongly impressed on my mind. I have nothing to say to any one as to which sect he belongs to, or what creed he believes; but I look on the man, who is firmly persuaded of infinite wisdom and goodness superintending and directing every circumstance that can happen in his lot—I felicitate such a man as having a solid foundation for his mental enjoyment; a firm prop and sure stay, in the hour of difficulty, trouble, and distress; and a never-failing anchor of hope, when he looks beyond the grave.

January 12th.

You will have seen our worthy and ingenious friend, the Doctor, long ere this. I hope he is well, and beg to be remembered to him. I have just been reading over again, I dare say for the hundred and fiftieth time, his "View of Society and Manners;" and still I read it with delight. His humour is perfectly original—it is neither the humour of Addison, nor Swift, nor Sterne, nor of any body but Dr. Moore. By the bye, you have deprived me of "Zelucō;" remember that, when you are disposed to rake up the sins of my neglect from among the ashes of my laziness.

He has paid me a pretty compliment, by quoting me in his last publication.*

* [“Edward”—*Currie.*]

R. B.

(39.) TO MRS. DUNLOP.

15th December, 1795.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

As I am in a complete Decemberish humour, gloomy, sullen, stupid, as even the deity of Dulness herself could wish, I shall not drawl out a heavy letter with a number of heavier apologies for my late silence. Only one I shall mention, because I know you will sympathize in it: these four months, a sweet little girl, my youngest child, has been so ill, that every day, a week or less, threatened to terminate her existence. There had much need be many pleasures annexed to the states of husband and father, for God knows, they have many peculiar cares. I cannot describe to you the anxious, sleepless hours these ties frequently give me. I see a train of helpless little folks; me and my exertions all their stay; and on what a brittle thread does the life of man hang! If I am nipt off at the command of fate; even in all the vigour of manhood as I am—such things happen every day—gracious God! what would become of my little flock! ‘Tis here that I envy your people of fortune.—A father on his death-bed, taking an everlasting leave of his children, has indeed woe enough; but the man of competent fortune leaves his sons and daughters independency and friends; while I—but I shall run distracted if I think any longer on the subject!

To leave talking of the matter so gravely, I shall sing with the old Scots ballad:

“O that I had ne’er been married,
I would never had nae care;
Now I’ve gotten wife and bairns,
They ery crowdie! evermarie.

Crowdie! ance; crowdie! twice;
Crowdie! three times in a day:
An ye crowdie ony mair,
Ye’ll crowdie a’ my meal away!”—

December 24th.

We have had a brilliant theatre here this season; only, as all other business does, it experiences a stagnation of trade from the epidemical complaint of the country, *want of cash*. I mention our theatre merely to lug in an occasional Address which I wrote for the benefit-night of one of the actresses, and which is as follows:—

ADDRESS,

SPOKEN BY MISS FONTENELLE ON HER BENEFIT-NIGHT,
DECEMBER 4TH, 1795, AT THE THEATRE, DUMFRIES.

Still anxious to secure your partial favour,

[See Posthumous Works.]

25th: *Christmas Morning.*

This, my much-loved friend, is a morning of wishes, accept mine—so Heaven hear me as they are sincere! that blessings may attend your steps, and affliction know you not! In the charming words of my favourite author, “The Man of Feeling,” “May the Great Spirit bear up the weight of thy grey hairs; and blunt the arrow that brings them rest!”

Now that I talk of authors, how do you like Cowper? Is not the “Task” a glorious poem? The religion of the “Task,” baiting a few scraps of Calvinistic divinity, is the religion of God and nature; the religion that exalts, that ennobles man. Were not you to send me your “Zeluco” in return for mine? Tell me how you like my marks and notes through the book. I would not give a farthing for a book, unless I were at liberty to blot it with my criticisms.

I have lately collected, for a friend’s perusal, all my letters; I mean those which I first sketched, in a rough draught, and afterwards wrote out fair. On looking over some old musty papers, which, from time to time, I had parcelled by, as trash that were scarce worth preserving, and which yet at the same time I did not care to destroy; I discovered many of these rude sketches, and have written, and am writing them out, in a bound MS. for my friend’s library. As I wrote always to you the rhapsody of the moment, I cannot find a single scroll to you, except one, about the commencement of our acquaintance. If there were any possible conveyance, I would send you a perusal of my book.

R. B.

(40.) TO MRS. DUNLOP.

[Dumfries.] 31st January, 1796.

THESE many months you have been two packets in my debt—what sin of ignorance I have committed against so highly-valued a friend I am utterly at a loss to guess. Alas! Madam, ill can I afford, at this time, to be deprived of any of the small remnant of my pleasures. I have lately drunk deep of the cup of affliction. The autumn robbed me of my only daughter and darling child, and that at a distance too, and so rapidly, as to put it out of my power to pay the last duties to her. I had scarcely begun to recover from that shock, when I became myself the victim of a most severe rheumatic fever, and long the die spun doubtful; until after many weeks of a sick bed, it seems to have turned up life, and I am beginning to crawl across my room, and once indeed have been before my own door in the street.

“When pleasure fascinates the mental sight,
Affliction purifies the visual ray,
Religion hails the drear, the untried night,
And shuts, for ever shuts! life’s doubtful day.”

R. B.

(41.) TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Brow [Saturday], 12th July, 1796.

MADAM,

I HAVE written you so often, without receiving any answer, that I would not trouble you again, but for the circumstances

in which I am. An illness which has long hung about me, in all probability will speedily send me beyond that *bourne whence no traveller returns*. Your friendship, with which for many years you honored me, was a friendship dearest to my soul. Your conversation, and especially your correspondence, were at once highly entertaining and instructive. With what pleasure did I use to break up the seal! The remembrance yet adds one pulse more to my poor palpitating heart.

Farewell!!!

R. B.

(1.) To Miss Margaret Chalmers.

(AFTERWARDS MRS. LEWIS HAY.)

[The following Fragments are all that now exist of twelve or fourteen of the finest Letters that Burns ever wrote. In an evil hour, the originals were thrown into the fire by the late Mrs. Adair of Scarborough: the "Charlotte" so often mentioned in this correspondence, and the lady to whom "The Banks of the Devon" is addressed.—*Cromek.*]

Sept. 26, 1787.

I SEND Charlotte the first number of the songs; I would not wait for the second number; I hate delays in little marks of friendship, as I hate dissimulation in the language of the heart. I am determined to pay Charlotte a poetic compliment, if I could hit on some glorious old Scotch air, in number second.* You will see a small attempt on a shred of paper in the book; but though Dr. Blacklock commended it very highly, I am not just satisfied with it myself. I intend to make it description of some kind: the whining cant of love, except in real passion, and by a masterly hand, is to me as insufferable as the preaching cant of old Father Smeaton, Whig-minister at Kilmaurs. Darts, flames, cupids, loves, graces, and all that farrago, are just a Mauchline * * * * —a senseless rabble.

I got an excellent poetic epistle yesternight from the old, venerable author of Tullochgorum, John of Badenyon, &c. I suppose you know he is a clergyman. It is by far the finest poetic compliment I ever got. I will send you a copy of it.

I go on Thursday or Friday to Dumfries to wait on Mr. Miller about his farms.—Do tell that to Lady Mackenzie, that she may give me credit for a little wisdom. "I Wisdom dwell with Prudence." What a blessed fire-side! How happy should I be to pass a winter evening under their venerable roof! and smoke a pipe of tobacco, or drink water-gruel with them! What solemn, lengthened, laughter-quashing gravity of phiz! What sage remarks on the good-for-nothing sons and daughters of indiscretion and folly! And what frugal lessons, as we straitened the fire-side circle, on the uses of the poker and tongs!

Miss N. is very well, and begs to be remembered in the old way to you. I used all my eloquence, all the persuasive flourishes of the hand, and heart-melting modulation of periods in my power, to urge her out to Hervieston, but all in vain. My rhetoric seems quite to have lost its effect on the lovely half of mankind. I have seen the day—but that is a "tale of other years."—In my conscience I believe that my heart has been so oft on fire that it is absolutely vitrified. I look on the sex with something like the admira-

tion with which I regard the starry sky in a frosty December night. I admire the beauty of the Creator's workmanship; I am charmed with the wild but graceful eccentricity of their motions, and—wish them good night. I mean this with respect to a certain passion *dont j'ai eu l'honneur d'être un miserable esclave*: as for friendship, you and Charlotte have given me pleasure, permanent pleasure, "which the world cannot give, nor take away," I hope; and which will outlast the heavens and the earth.

R. B.

* [Of the Scots Musical Museum—*Cromek.*]

(2.)

TO MISS CHALMERS.

[Without date.]

I HAVE been at Dumfries, and at one visit more shall be decided about a farm in that country. I am rather hopeless in it; but as my brother is an excellent farmer, and is, besides, an exceedingly prudent, sober man (qualities which are only a younger brother's fortune in our family), I am determined, if my Dumfries business fail me, to return into partnership with him, and at our leisure take another farm in the neighbourhood. I assure you I look for high compliments from you and Charlotte on this very sage instance of my unfathomable, incomprehensible wisdom. Talking of Charlotte, I must tell her that I have, to the best of my power, paid her a poetic compliment, now compleated. The air is admirable: true old Highland. It was the tune of a Gaelic song which an Inverness lady sung me when I was there; and I was so charmed with it that I begged her to write me a set of it from her singing; for it had never been set before. I am fixed that it shall go in Johnson's next number; so Charlotte and you need not spend your precious time in contradicting me. I won't say the poetry is first-rate; though I am convinced it is very well: and, what is not always the case with compliments to ladies, it is not only sincere, but *just*.

[Here follows the song "The Banks of the Devon."]

R. B.

(3.)

TO MISS CHALMERS.

Edinburgh, Nov. 21, 1787.

I HAVE one vexatious fault to the kindly-welcome, well-filled sheet which I owe to your and Charlotte's goodness—it contains too much sense, sentiment, and good-spelling. It is impossible that even you two, whom I declare to my God I will give credit for any degree of excellence the sex are capable of attaining, it is impossible you can go on to correspond at that rate; so like those who, Shenstone says, retire because they have made a good speech, I shall, after a few letters, hear no more of you. I insist that you shall write whatever comes first: what you see, what you read, what you hear, what you admire, what you dislike, trifles, bagatelles, nonsense; or to fill up a corner, e'en put down a laugh at full length. Now none of your polite hints about flattery: I leave that to your lovers, if you have or shall have any; though, thank heaven,

I have found at last two girls who can be luxuriantly happy in their own minds and with one another, without that commonly necessary appendage to female bliss, A LOVER.

Charlotte and you are just two favourite resting-places for my soul in her wanderings through the weary, thorny wilderness of this world—God knows I am ill-fitted for the struggle: I glory in being a Poet, and I want to be thought a wise man—I would fondly be generous, and I wish to be rich. After all, I am afraid I am a lost subject. “Some folk hae a hantle o’ faults, an’ I’m but a ne’er-do-weel.”

Afternoon.—To close the melancholy reflections at the end of last sheet, I shall just add a piece of devotion commonly known in Carrick by the title of the “Wabster’s grace.”

“Some say we’re thieves, and e’en sae are we!
Some say we lie, and e’en sae do we!
Gude forgie us, and I hope sae will he!
—Up and to your looms, lads.”

R. B.

(4.)

TO MISS CHALMERS.

Edinburgh, Dec. 12, 1787.

I AM here under the care of a surgeon, with a bruised limb extended on a cushion; and the tints of my mind varying with the livid horror preceding a midnight thunder-storm. A drunken coachman was the cause of the first, and incomparably the lightest evil; misfortune, bodily constitution, hell and myself, have formed a “Quadruple Alliance” to guarantee the other. I got my fall on Saturday, and am getting slowly better.

I have taken tooth and nail to the Bible, and am got through the five books of Moses, and half way in Joshua. It is really a glorious book. I sent for my book-binder today, and ordered him to get me an octavo Bible in sheets, the best paper and print in town; and bind it with all the elegance of his craft.

I would give my best song to my worst enemy, I mean the merit of making it, to have you and Charlotte by me. You are angelic creatures, and would pour oil and wine into my wounded spirit.

I inclose you a proof copy of the “Banks of the Devon,” which present with my best wishes to Charlotte. The “Ochel-hills” you shall probably have next week for yourself. None of your fine speeches!

R. B.

(5.)

TO MISS CHALMERS.

Edinburgh, Dec. 19, 1787.

I BEGIN this letter in answer to yours of the 17th current, which is not yet cold since I read it. The atmosphere of my soul is vastly clearer than when I wrote you last. For the first time, yesterday I crossed the room on crutches. It would do your heart good to see my bardship, not on my poetic, but on my oaken stilts; throwing my best leg with an air! and with as much hilarity in my gait and countenance, as a May frog leaping across the newly harrowed ridge, en-

joying the fragrance of the refreshed earth after the long-expected shower!

* * * * *

I can’t say I am altogether at my ease when I see anywhere in my path that meagre, squalid, famine-faced spectre, poverty; attended, as he always is, by iron-fisted oppression, and leering contempt; but I have sturdily withstood his buffettings many a hard-laboured day already, and still my motto is—I DARE! My worst enemy is *Moi-même*. I lie so miserably open to the inroads and incursions of a mischievous, light-armed, well-mounted banditti, under the banners of imagination, whim, caprice, and passion; and the heavy-armed veteran regulars of wisdom, prudence, and forethought, move so very, very slow, that I am almost in a state of perpetual warfare, and, alas! frequent defeat. There are just two creatures that I would envy; a horse in his wild state traversing the forests of Asia, or an oyster on some of the desert shores of Europe. The one has not a wish without enjoyment, the other has neither wish nor fear.

R. B.

(6.)

TO MISS CHALMERS.

Edinburgh, Dec., 1787.

MY DEAR MADAM,

I JUST now have read yours. The poetic compliments I pay cannot be misunderstood. They are neither of them so particular as to point you out to the world at large; and the circle of your acquaintances will allow all I have said. Besides, I have complimented you chiefly, almost solely, on your mental charms. Shall I be plain with you? I will; so look to it. Personal attractions, Madam, you have much above par; wit, understanding, and worth, you possess in the first class. This is a cursed flat way of telling you these truths, but let me hear no more of your sheepish timidity. I know the world a little. I know what they will say of my poems; by second sight, I suppose; for I am seldom out in my conjectures; and you may believe me, my dear Madam, I would not run any risk of hurting you by an ill-judged compliment. I wish to show to the world, the odds between a poet’s friends and those of simple prosemen. More for your information, both the pieces go in. One of them, “Where braving angry winter’s storms,” is already set—the tune is Neil Gow’s lamentation for Abercarny; the other is to be set to an old Highland air in Daniel Dow’s “Collection of antient Scots music;” the name is *Ha a Chaillich air mo Dheidh*. My treacherous memory has forgot every circumstance about *Les Incas*, only I think you mentioned them as being in Creech’s possession. I shall ask him about it. I am afraid the song of “Somebody” will come too late—as I shall, for certain, leave town in a week for Ayrshire, and from that to Dumfries, but there my hopes are slender. I leave my direction in town, so any thing, wherever I am, will reach me.

I saw your’s to —; it is not too severe, nor did he take it amiss. On the contrary, like a whipt spaniel, he talks of being with you in the Christmas days. Mr. — has given

him the invitation, and he is determined to accept of it. O selfishness! he owns in his sober moments, that from his own volatility of inclination, the circumstances in which he is situated, and his knowledge of his father's disposition,—the whole affair is chimerical—yet he *will* gratify an idle *penchant* at the enormous, cruel expense of perhaps ruining the peace of the very woman for whom he professes the generous passion of love! He is a gentleman in his mind and manners—*tant pis!* He is a volatile school-boy: the heir of a man's fortune who well knows the value of two times two!

Perdition seize them and their fortunes, before they should make the amiable, the lovely — the derided object of their purse-proud contempt.

I am doubly happy to hear of Mrs. —'s recovery, because I really thought all was over with her. There are days of pleasure yet awaiting her.

"As I cam in by Glenap
I met with an aged woman;
She bade me cheer up my heart,
For the best o' my days was comin."

This day will decide my affairs with Creech. Things are, like myself, not what they ought to be; yet better than what they appear to be.

"Heaven's sovereign saves all beings but himself
That hideous sight—a naked human heart."

Farewell! Remember me to Charlotte.

R. B.

(7.) TO MISS CHALMERS.

Edinburgh, March 14, 1788.

I KNOW, my ever dear friend, that you will be pleased with the news when I tell you, I have at last taken a lease of a farm. Yesternight I compleated a bargain with Mr. Miller, of Dalswinton, for the farm of Ellisland, on the banks of the Nith, between five and six miles above Dumfries. I begin at Whitsunday to build a house, drive lime, &c.; and heaven be my help! for it will take a strong effort to bring my mind into the routine of business. I have discharged all the army of my former pursuits, fancies, and pleasures; a motley host! and have literally and strictly retained only the ideas of a few friends, which I have incorporated into a life-guard. I trust in Dr. Johnson's observation, "Where much is attempted, something is done." Firmness, both in sufferance and exertion, is a character I would wish to be thought to possess; and have always despised the whining yelp of complaint, and the cowardly, feeble resolve.

* * * * *

Poor Miss K. is ailing a good deal this winter, and begged me to remember her to you the first time I wrote you. Surely woman, amiable woman, is often made in vain! Too delicately formed for the rougher pursuits of ambition; too noble for the dirt of avarice, and even too gentle for the rage of pleasure: formed indeed for, and highly susceptible of enjoyment and rapture; but that enjoyment, alas! almost wholly at the mercy of the caprice, malevolence, stupidity, or wickedness of an animal at all times comparatively unfeeling, and often brutal.

R. B.

(8.) TO MISS CHALMERS.

Mauchline, 7th April, 1788.

I AM indebted to you and Miss Nimmo for letting me know Miss Kennedy. Strange! how apt we are to indulge prejudices in our judgments of one another! Even I, who pique myself on my skill in marking characters; because I am too proud of my character as a man, to be dazzled in my judgment for glaring wealth; and too proud of my situation as a poor man to be biased against squalid poverty; I was unacquainted with Miss K.'s very uncommon worth.

I am going on a good deal progressive in *mon grand but*, the sober science of life. I have lately made some sacrifices for which, were I *vivâ voce* with you to paint the situation and recount the circumstances, you would applaud me.

R. B.

(9.) TO MISS CHALMERS.

[No date.]

Now for that wayward, unfortunate thing, myself. I have broke measures with Creech, and last week I wrote him a frosty, keen letter. He replied in terms of chastisement, and promised me upon his honor that I should have the account on Monday; but this is Tuesday, and yet I have not heard a word from him. God have mercy on me! a poor d-mned, incautious, duped, unfortunate fool! The sport, the miserable victim, of rebellious pride, hypochondriac imagination, agonizing sensibility, and bedlam passions!

"I wish that I were dead, but I'm no like to die!" I had lately "a hairbreadth 'scape, in th' imminent deadly breach" of love too. Thank my stars I got off heart-whole, "waur fley'd than hurt."—Interruption.

I have this moment got a hint * * * * I fear I am something like—undone—but I hope for the best. Come, stubborn pride and unshrinking resolution! accompany me through this, to me, miserable world! You must not desert me! Your friendship I think I can count on, though I should date my letters from a marching regiment. Early in life, and all my life, I reckoned on a recruiting drum as my forlorn hope. Seriously though, life at present presents me with but a melancholy path: but—my limb will soon be sound, and I shall struggle on.

R. B.

(10.) TO MISS CHALMERS.

Edinburgh, Sunday [February 17].

TO-MORROW, my dear Madam, I leave Edinburgh. * * * * I have altered all my plans of future life. A farm that I could live in, I could not find; and indeed, after the necessary support my brother and the rest of the family required, I could not venture on farming in that style suitable to my feelings. You will condemn me for the next step I have taken. I have entered into the Excise. I stay in the west about three weeks, and then return to Edinburgh for six weeks' instructions; afterwards, for I get employ instantly, I go où il plait à Dieu,—et mon Roi. I have chosen this,

my dear friend, after mature deliberation. The question is not at what door of fortune's palace shall we enter in; but what doors does she open to us? I was not likely to get anything to do. I wanted *un bâti*, which is a dangerous, an unhappy situation. I got this without any hanging on, or mortifying solicitation; it is immediate bread, and though poor in comparison of the last eighteen months of my existence, 'tis luxury in comparison of all my preceding life: besides, the commissioners are some of them my acquaintances, and all of them my firm friends.

R. B.

(11.) TO MISS CHALMERS,
EDINBURGH.

Ellisland, near Dumfries, Sept. 16, 1788.

WHERE are you? and how are you? and is Lady Mackenzie recovering her health? for I have had but one solitary letter from you. I will not think you have forgot me, Madam; and for my part—

"When thee, Jerusalem, I forget,
Skill part from my right hand!"

"My heart is not of that rock, nor my soul careless as that sea." I do not make my progress among mankind as a bowl does among its fellows—rolling through the crowd without bearing away any mark or impression, except where they hit in hostile collision.

I am here, driven in with my harvest-folks by bad weather; and as you and your sister once did me the honor of interesting yourselves much *à l'égard de moi*, I sit down to beg the continuation of your goodness.—I can truly say that, all the exterior of life apart, I never saw two, whose esteem flattered the nobler feelings of my soul—I will not say, more, but, so much as Lady Mackenzie and Miss Chalmers. When I think of you—hearts the best, minds the noblest of human kind—unfortunate, even in the shades of life—when I think I have met with you, and have lived more of real life with you in eight days than I can do with almost any body I meet with in eight years—when I think on the improbability of meeting you in this world again—I could sit down and cry like a child!—If ever you honored me with a place in your esteem, I trust I can now plead more desert.—I am secure against that crushing grip of iron poverty, which, alas! is less or more fatal to the native worth and purity of, I fear, the noblest souls; and a late important step in my life has kindly taken me out of the way of those ungrateful iniquities, which, however overlooked in fashionable licence, or varnished in fashionable phrase, are indeed but lighter and deeper shades of VILLAINY.

Shortly after my last return to Ayrshire, I married "my Jean." This was not in consequence of the attachment of romance, perhaps; but I had a long and much loved fellow-creature's happiness or misery in my determination, and I durst not trifle with so important a deposit. Nor have I any cause to repent it. If I have not got polite tattle, modish manners, and fashionable dress, I am not sickened and disgusted with the multiform curse of boarding-school affectation;

and I have got the handsomest figure, the sweetest temper, the soundest constitution, and the kindest heart in the county. Mrs. Burns believes, as firmly as her creed, that I am *le plus bel esprit, et le plus honnête homme* in the universo; although she scarcely ever in her life, except the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, and the Psalms of David in metre, spent five minutes together on either prose or verse.—I must except also from this last, a certain late publication of Scots poems, which she has perused very devoutly; and all the ballads in the country, as she has (O the partial lover! you will cry) the finest "wood note wild" I ever heard.—I am the more particular in this lady's character, as I know she will henceforth have the honor of a share in your best wishes. She is still at Mauchline, as I am building my house; for this hovel that I shelter in, while occasionally here, is pervious to every blast that blows, and every shower that falls; and I am only preserved from being chilled to death, by being suffocated with smoke. I do not find my farm that pennyworth I was taught to expect, but I believe, in time, it may be a saving bargain. You will be pleased to hear that I have laid aside idle *éclat*, and bind every day after my reapers.

To save me from that horrid situation of at any time going down, in a losing bargain of a farm, to misery, I have taken my Excise instructions, and have my commission in my pocket for any emergency of fortune. If I could set *all* before your view, whatever disrespect you, in common with the world, have for this business, I know you would approve of my idea.

I will make no apology, dear Madam, for this egotistic detail: I know you and your sister will be interested in every circumstance of it. What signify the silly, idle gewgaws of wealth, or the ideal trumpery of greatness! When fellow-partakers of the same nature fear the same God, have the same benevolence of heart, the same nobleness of soul, the same detestation at every thing dishonest, and the same scorn at every thing unworthy—if they are not in the dependance of absolute beggary, in the name of common sense are they not EQUALS? And if the bias, the instinctive bias, of their souls run the same way, why may they not be FRIENDS?

When I may have an opportunity of sending you this, Heaven only knows. Shenstone says, "When one is confined idle within doors by bad weather, the best antidote against *ennui* is to read the letters of, or write to, one's friends;" in that case then, if the weather continues thus, I may scrawl you half a quire.

I very lately, to wit, since harvest began, wrote a poem, not in imitation, but in the manner, of Pope's Moral Epistles. It is only a short essay, just to try the strength of my Muse's pinion in that way. I will send you a copy of it, when once I have heard from you. I have likewise been laying the foundation of some pretty large poetic works: how the superstructure will come on, I leave to that great maker and marrer of projects—TIME. Johnson's collection of Scots songs is going on in the third volume; and, of consequence, finds me a consumpt for a great deal of idle metre.—One of the most tolerable things I have done in that way is two stanzas that I made to an air, a musical gentleman* of my acquaintance composed for the anniversary of his wedding-day, which happens on the seventh of November. Take it as follows:

The day returns—my bosom burns,
The blissful day we twa did meet,
[See Poetical Works.]

I shall give over this letter for shame. If I should be seized with a scribbling fit, before this goes away, I shall make it another letter; and then you may allow your patience a week's respite between the two. I have not room for more than the old, kind, hearty, FAREWELL!

To make some amends, *mes chères Mesdames*, for dragging you on to this second sheet, and to relieve a little the tiresomeness of my unstudied and uncorrectible prose, I shall transcribe you some of my late poetic bagatelles; though I have, these eight or ten months, done very little that way. One day, in a Hermitage on the banks of Nith, belonging to a gentleman* in my neighbourhood, who is so good as give me a key at pleasure, I wrote as follows; supposing myself the sequestered, venerable inhabitant of the lonely mansion.

LINES WRITTEN IN FRIARS-CARSE HERMITAGE.

Thou whom chance may hither lead,
Be thou clad in russet weed;

[See Poetical Works.]

R. B.

* [Capt. Riddel of Glenriddel.—*Cromek.*.]

To Miss Mabane.

[AFTERWARDS MRS. COLONEL WRIGHT.]

Saturday Noon, No. 2, St. James's Sq.
Newtown, Edinburgh.

HERE have I sat, my dear Madam, in the stony attitude of perplexed study for fifteen vexatious minutes, my head askew, bending over the intended card; my fixed eye insensible to the very light of day poured around; my pendulous goose-feather, loaded with ink, hanging over the future letter; all for the important purpose of writing a complimentary card to accompany your trinket.

Compliment is such a miserable Greenland expression; lies at such a chilly polar distance from the torrid zone of my constitution, that I cannot, for the very soul of me, use it to any person for whom I have the twentieth part of the esteem every one must have for you who knows you.

As I leave town in three or four days, I can give myself the pleasure of calling for you only for a minute. Tuesday evening, some time about seven, or after, I shall wait on you, for your farewell commands.

The hinge of your box I put into the hands of the proper Connoisseur. The broken glass, likewise, went under review; but deliberative wisdom thought it would too much endanger the whole fabrie.

I am, dear Madam,

With all sincerity of Enthusiasm,
Your very humble Servant,

R. B.

To Mrs. M'Lehose.

(1.)

(CLARINDA.)

[The remarkable correspondence between our Author and Mrs. M'Lehose—"Clarinda"—was originally published in an imperfect, apparently surreptitious, way, as an appendix to an edition of the Poet's works, by Stewart and M'Gowen of Glasgow, 1802. Notwithstanding the lady's remonstrance, who perhaps justly considered herself aggrieved, no fewer than six separate editions of this imperfect work succeeded in Scotland, England, or Ireland, down to the year 1831. To prevent further misapprehensions from this source, and also to render his own edition of the Poet's works as complete as possible, Allan Cunningham appealed earnestly to Mrs. M'Lehose for permission to make a selection at least from the entire correspondence, which he promised to do with "all due tenderness," &c. This application was refused; and strangely enough we find Mr. Cunningham, in one of his notes, depreciating the whole subject as "a sort of Corydon and Phillis affair" which had been "speedily suppressed." Finally, after the lady's own death and the death also of her son, into whose hands the documents had fallen, the question of a perfect edition was revived. This, after some delay in obtaining the originals, was undertaken by W. C. M'Lehose, Esq., grandson of "Clarinda," who, with Mr. Chambers's valuable editorial assistance, brought out a reliable version of the entire correspondence, in 1843, with an interesting memoir of the lady. From that edition, the following letters by our Author have been selected, and carefully collated, as far as possible, with corresponding letters in original edition. There seems, indeed, to be very little difference between them as to text—the only remarkable difference being in the number of the letters themselves, which is very considerable, and in their consecutive arrangement, which is entirely different. The blanks which occasionally occur in final edition are to be accounted for by the circumstance, that many of the letters, having been preserved and frequently opened during a period of fifty years at least, had been torn or wasted, whilst from a few of them signatures and detached sentences had been clipp'd off, to gratify collectors of autographs.]

[December 6, 1787.]

MADAM,

I HAD set no small store by my tea-drinking to-night, and have not often been so disappointed. Saturday evening I shall embrace the opportunity with the greatest pleasure. I leave this town this day se'ennight, and probably I shall not return for a couple of twelvemonths; but I must ever regret that I so lately got an acquaintance I shall ever highly esteem, and in whose welfare I shall ever be warmly interested.

Our worthy common friend Miss Nimmo, in her usual pleasant way, rallied me a good deal on my new acquaintance; and, in the humour of her ideas, I wrote some lines, which I enclose you, as I think they have a good deal of poetic merit; and Miss Nimmo tells me you are not only a critic but a poetess. Fiction, you know, is the native region of poetry; and I hope you will pardon my vanity in sending you the bagatelle as a tolerable off-hand *jeu-d'esprit*. I have several poetic trifles, which I shall gladly leave with Miss Nimmo or you, if they were worth house-room; as there are scarcely two people on earth by whom it would mortify me more to be forgotten, though at the distance of nine score miles.—I am, Madam, with the highest respect, your very humble servant,

ROBERT BURNS.

Thursday Even.

(2.)

TO MRS. M'LEHOSE.

[December 8.]

I CAN say with truth, Madam, that I never met with a person in my life whom I more anxiously wished to meet again than yourself. To-night I was to have had that very

great pleasure—I was intoxicated with the idea; but an unlucky fall from a coach has so bruised one of my knees, that I can't stir my leg off the cushion. So, if I don't see you again, I shall not rest in my grave for chagrin. I was vexed to the soul I had not seen you sooner. I determined to cultivate your friendship with the enthusiasm of religion; but thus has Fortune ever served me. I cannot bear the idea of leaving Edinburgh without seeing you. I know not how to account for it—I am strangely taken with some people, nor am I often mistaken. You are a stranger to me—but I am an odd being. Some yet unnamed feelings—things, not principles, but better than whims—carry me farther than boasted reason ever did a philosopher. Farewell! every happiness be yours.

ROBERT BURNS.

Saturday Even., St. James' Sqr., No. 2.

(3.) TO MRS. M'LEHOSE.

[*December 12.*]

I STRETCH a point, indeed, my dearest Madam, when I answer your card on the rack of my present agony. Your friendship, Madam! By heavens, I was never proud before. Your lines, I maintain it, are poetry, and good poetry; mine were, indeed, partly a fiction, and partly a friendship which, had I been so blest as to have met with you *in time*, might have led me—God of love only knows where. Time is too short for ceremonies.

I swear solemnly (in all the tenor of my former oath) to remember you in all the pride and warmth of friendship until—I cease to be!

To-morrow, and every day, till I see you, you shall hear from me.

Farewell! May you enjoy a better night's repose than I am likely to have.

[R. B.]

(4.) TO MRS. M'LEHOSE.

[*December 20.*]

YOUR last, my dear Madam, had the effect on me that Job's situation had on his friends, when “they sat down seven days and seven nights astonished, and spake not a word.”—“Pay my addresses to a married woman!” I started as if I had seen the ghost of him I had injured. I recollect my expressions; some of them indeed were, in the law phrase, “habit and repute,” which is being half guilty. I cannot positively say, Madam, whether my heart might not have gone astray a little; but I can declare, upon the honour of a poet, that the vagrant has wandered unknown to me. I have a pretty handsome troop of follies of my own; and like some other people's, they are but undisciplined blackguards: but the luckless rascals have something of honour in them; they would not do a dishonest thing.

To meet with an unfortunate woman, amiable and young, deserted and widowed by those who were bound by every

tie of duty, nature, and gratitude, to protect, comfort, and cherish her; add to all, when she is perhaps one of the first of lovely forms and noble minds, the mind, too, that hits one's tastes as the joys of Heaven do a saint—should a vague infant idea, the natural child of imagination, thoughtlessly peep over the fence—were you, my friend, to sit in judgment, and the poor, airy straggler brought before you, trembling, self-condemned, with artless eyes, brimful of contrition, looking wistfully on its judge,—you could not, my dear Madam, condemn the hapless wretch to death “without benefit of clergy!”

I won't tell you what reply my heart made to your railery of “seven years;” but I will give you what a brother of my trade says on the same allusion:—

The Patriarch to gain a wife,
Chaste, beautiful, and young,
Served fourteen years a painful life,
And never thought it long.

Oh were you to reward such cares,
And life so long would stay,
Not fourteen but four hundred years
Would seem but as one day!

I have written you this scrawl because I have nothing else to do, and you may sit down and find fault with it, if you have no better way of consuming your time; but finding fault with the vagaries of a poet's fancy is much such another business as Xerxes chastising the waves of Hellespont.

My limb now allows me to sit in some peace; to walk I have yet no prospect of, as I can't mark it to the ground.

I have just now looked over what I have written, and it is such a chaos of nonsense that I daresay you will throw it into the fire, and call me an idle, stupid fellow; but whatever you think of my brains, believe me to be, with the most sacred respect, and heartfelt esteem,

My dear Madam,

Your humble servant,
ROBERT BURNS.

To Clarinda.

(1.)

(MRS. M'LEHOSE.)

[At this date, Mrs. M'Lehose herself having assumed the name of ‘Clarinda,’ our Author, following suit, adopted that of ‘Sylvander,’ and correspondence was continued under these fictitious signatures—a fact which explains much extravagance that would have been otherwise inexpensable.]

Friday Evening.

I BEG your pardon, my dear “Clarinda,” for the fragment scrawl I sent you yesterday. I really don't know what I wrote. A gentleman, for whose character, abilities, and critical knowledge, I have the highest veneration, called in just as I had begun the second sentence, and I would not make the porter wait. I read to my much-respected friend several of my own bagatelles, and, among others, your lines, which I had copied out. He began some criticism on them as on the other pieces, when I informed him they were the work of a young lady in this town; which, I assure you, made him stare. My learned friend seriously protested, that he did not believe

any young woman in Edinburgh was capable of such lines; and, if you know anything of Professor Gregory, you will neither doubt of his abilities nor his sincerity. I do love you, if possible, still better for having so fine a taste and turn for poesy. I have again gone wrong in my usual unguarded way, but you may erase the word, and put esteem, respect, or any other tame Dutch expression you please, in its place. I believe there is no holding converse, or carrying on correspondence, with an amiable woman, much less a *gloriously amiable fine woman*, without some mixture of that delicious passion, whose most devoted slave I have more than once had the honour of being—But why be hurt or offended on that account? Can no honest man have a prepossession for a fine woman, but he must run his head against an intrigue? Take a little of the tender witchcraft of love, and add it to the generous, the honourable sentiments of manly friendship; and I know but one more delightful morsel, which few, few in any rank ever taste. Such a composition is like adding cream to strawberries: it not only gives the fruit a more elegant richness, but has a peculiar deliciousness of its own.

I enclose you a few lines I composed on a late melancholy occasion. I will not give above five or six copies of it at all; and I would be hurt if any friend should give any copies without my consent.

You cannot imagine, Clarinda (I like the idea of Arcadian names in a commerce of this kind), how much store I have set by the hopes of your future friendship. I don't know if you have a just idea of my character, but I wish you to see me as I am. I am, as most people of my trade are, a strange Will-o'-wisp being; the victim, too frequently, of much imprudence and many follies. My great constituent elements are *pride* and *passion*: the first I have endeavoured to humanize into integrity and honour; the last makes me a devotee, to the warmest degree of enthusiasm, in love, religion, or friendship—either of them, or all together, as I happen to be inspired. 'Tis true I never saw you but once; but how much acquaintance did I form with you in that once! Do not think I flatter you, or have a design upon you, Clarinda: I have too much pride for the one, and too little cold contrivance for the other; but of all God's creatures I ever could approach in the beaten way of acquaintance, you struck me with the deepest, the strongest, the most permanent impression. I say the most permanent, because I know myself well, and how far I can promise either on my prepossessions or powers. Why are you unhappy?—and why are so many of our fellow-creatures, unworthy to belong to the same species with you, blest with all they can wish? You have a hand all benevolent to give—why were you denied the pleasure? You have a heart formed, gloriously formed, for all the most refined luxuries of love—why was that heart ever wrung? O Clarinda! shall we not meet in a state, some yet unknown state of being, where the lavish hand of plenty shall minister to the highest wish of benevolence; and where the chill north-wind of prudence shall never blow over the flowery fields of enjoyment? If we do not, man was made in vain! I deserved most of the unhappy hours that have lingered over my head; they were the wages of my labour. But what unprovoked demon, malignant as hell, stole upon the confidence

of unmistrusting busy Fate, and dashed *your* cup of life with undeserved sorrow?

Let me know how long your stay will be out of town: I shall count the hours till you inform me of your return. Cursed *etiquette* forbids your seeing me just now; and so soon as I can walk I must bid Edinburgh adieu. Lord, why was I born to see misery which I cannot relieve, and to meet with friends whom I can't enjoy! I look back with the pangs of unavailing avarice on my loss in not knowing you sooner: all last winter—these three months past—what luxury of intercourse have I not lost! Perhaps, though, 'twas better for my peace. You see I am either above, or incapable of dissimulation. I believe it is want of that particular genius. I despise design, because I want either coolness or wisdom to be capable of it. I am interrupted.—Adieu! my dear Clarinda!

SYLVANDER.

(2.)

TO CLARINDA.

[January 3d.]

MY DEAR CLARINDA,

YOUR last verses have so delighted me, that I have copied them in among some of my own most valued pieces, which I keep sacred for my own use. Do let me have a few now and then.

Did you, Madam, know what I feel when you talk of your sorrows!

Good God! that one, who has so much worth in the sight of heaven, and is so amiable to her fellow-creatures, should be so unhappy! I can't venture out for cold. My limb is vastly better; but I have not any use of it without my crutches. Monday, for the first time, I dine in a neighbour's, next door, As soon as I can go so far, *even in a coach*, my first visit shall be to you. Write me when you leave town, and immediately when you return; and I earnestly pray your stay may be short. You can't imagine how miserable you made me when you hinted to me not to write. Farewell.

SYLVANDER.

(3.)

TO CLARINDA.

[January 4th.]

You are right, my dear Clarinda: a friendly correspondence goes for nothing, except one write their undisguised sentiments. Yours please me for their intrinsic merit, as well as because they are yours; which, I assure you, is to me a high recommendation. Your religious sentiments, Madam, I revere. If you have, on some suspicious evidence, from some lying oracle, learnt that I despise or ridicule so sacredly-important a matter as real religion, you have, my Clarinda, much misconstrued your friend. "I am not mad, most noble Festus!" Have you ever met a perfect character? Do we not sometimes rather exchange faults than get rid of them? For instance, I am perhaps tired with, and shocked at a life too much the prey of giddy inconsistencies and thoughtless follies. By degrees I grow sober, prudent, and stately pious. I say stately; because the most unaffected devotion is not at all inconsistent with my first character. I join the world in

congratulating myself on the happy change. But let me pry more narrowly into this affair. Have I, at bottom, any thing of a secret pride in these endowments and emendations? Have I nothing of a presbyterian sourness, an hypercritical severity, when I survey my less regular neighbours? In a word, have I missed all those nameless and numberless modifications of indistinct selfishness, which are so near our own eyes that we can scarce bring them within our sphere of vision, and which the known spotless cambrie of our character hides from the ordinary observer?

My definition of worth is short: truth and humanity respecting our fellow-creatures; reverence and humility in the presence of that Being, my Creator and Preserver, and who, I have every reason to believe, will one day be my Judge. The first part of my definition is the creature of unbiassed instinct; the last is the child of after-reflection. Where I found these two essentials, I would gently note, and slightly mention, any attendant flaws—flaws, the marks, the consequences of human nature.

I can easily enter into the sublime pleasures that your strong imagination and keen sensibility must derive from religion, particularly if a little in the shade of misfortune; but I own I cannot, without a marked grudge, see Heaven totally engross so amiable, so charming a woman, as my friend Clarinda; and should be very well pleased at a *circumstance* that would put it in the power of somebody (happy somebody!) to divide her attention, with all the delicacy and tenderness of an earthly attachment.

You will not easily persuade me that you have not a grammatical knowledge of the English language.—So far from being inaccurate, you are elegant beyond any woman of my acquaintance, except one, whom I wish you knew.

Your last verses to me have so delighted me, that I have got an excellent old Scots air that suits the measure, and you shall see them in print in the Scots Musical Museum, a work publishing by a friend of mine in this town. I want four stanzas; you gave me but three, and one of them alluded to an expression in my former letter; so I have taken your two first verses, with a slight alteration in the second, and have added a third; but you must help me to a fourth. Here they are: the latter half of the first stanza would have been worthy of Sappho. I am in raptures with it.

“Talk not of Love, it gives me pain,
For Love has been my foe;
He bound me with an iron chain,
And sunk me deep in woe.

“But Friendship’s pure and lasting joys
My heart was formed to prove;
There, welcome, win and wear the prize,
But never talk of Love.

“Your friendship much can make me blest,
O why that bliss destroy?
Why urge the [odious] one request,
You know I [must] deny!”

[only]
[will]

The alteration in the second stanza is no improvement, but there was a slight inaccuracy in your rhyme. The third I only offer to your choice, and have left two words for your determination. The air is “The Banks of Spey,” and is most beautiful.

To-morrow evening I intend taking a chair, and paying a visit at Park Place to a much-valued old friend. If I could be sure of finding you at home (and I will send one of the chairmen to call), I would spend from five to six o’clock with you, as I go past. I cannot do more at this time, as I have something on my hand that hurries me much. I propose giving you the first call, my old friend the second, and Miss Nimmo as I return home. Do not break any engagement for me, as I will spend another evening with you at any rate before I leave town.

Do not tell me that you are pleased when your friends inform you of your faults. I am ignorant what they are; but I am sure they must be such evanescent trifles, compared with your personal and mental accomplishments, that I would despise the ungenerous, narrow soul, who would notice any shadow of imperfections you may seem to have, any other way than in the most delicate agreeable railing. Coarse minds are not aware how much they injure the keenly-feeling tie of bosom-friendship, when, in their foolish officiousness, they mention what nobody cares for recollecting. People of nice sensibility and generous minds have a certain intrinsic dignity, that fires at being trifled with, or lowered, or even too nearly approached.

You need make no apology for long letters: I am even with you. Many happy New Years to you, charming Clarinda! I can’t dissemble, were it to shun perdition. He who sees you as I have done, and does not love you, deserves to be damn’d for his stupidity! He who loves you, and would injure you, deserves to be doubly damn’d for his villainy! Adieu.

SYLVANDER.

P.S.—What would you think of this for a fourth stanza?

[“Your thought, if love must harbour there,
Conceal it in that thought,
Nor cause me from my bosom tear
The very friend I sought.”]

(4.)

TO CLARINDA.

Saturday Noon.

SOME days, some nights, nay, some hours, like the “ten righteous persons in Sodom,” save the rest of the vapid, tiresome, miserable months and years of life. One of these hours my dear Clarinda blest me with yesternight.

—“One well spent hour,
In such a tender circumstance for friends,
Is better than an age of common time.”

THOMSON.

My favourite feature in Milton’s Satan is his manly fortitude in supporting what cannot be remedied—in short, the wild broken fragments of a noble exalted mind in ruins. I meant no more by saying he was a favourite hero of mine.

I mentioned to you my letter to Dr. Moore, giving an account of my life—it is truth, every word of it; and will give you the just idea of a man whom you have honoured with your friendship. I am afraid you will hardly be able to make sense of so torn a piece.—Your verses I shall muse

on deliciously, as I gaze on your image in my mind's eye, in my heart's core; they will be in time enough for a week to come. I am truly happy your head-ache is better.—O, how can pain or evil be so daringly, unfeelingly, cruelly savage, as to wound so noble a mind, so lovely a form!

My little fellow is all my name-sake.—Write me soon. My every, strongest good wish attend you, Clarinda!

SYLVANDER.

I know not what I have written—I am pestered with people around me.

(5.)

TO CLARINDA.

Tuesday Night.

I AM delighted, charming Clarinda, with your honest enthusiasm for religion. Those of either sex, but particularly the female, who are lukewarm in that most important of all things, "O my soul, come not thou into their secrets!"

I feel myself deeply interested in your good opinion, and will lay before you the outlines of my belief. He who is our Author and Preserver, and will one day be our Judge, must be (not for his sake in the way of duty, but from the native impulse of our hearts) the object of our reverential awe and grateful adoration. He is almighty and all-bounteous, we are weak and dependent; hence prayer and every other sort of devotion. "He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to everlasting life;" consequently it must be in every one's power to embrace his offer of "everlasting life;" otherwise he could not, in justice, condemn those who did not. A mind pervaded, actuated, and governed by purity, truth, and charity, though it does not *merit* heaven, yet is an absolutely-necessary pre-requisite, without which heaven can neither be obtained nor enjoyed; and, by divine promise, such a mind shall never fail of attaining "everlasting life:" hence the impure, the deceiving, and the uncharitable, exclude themselves from eternal bliss, by their unfitness for enjoying it. The Supreme Being has put the immediate administration of all this, for wise and good ends known to himself, into the hands of Jesus Christ, a great personage, whose relation to him we cannot comprehend, but whose relation to us is a Guide and Saviour; and who, except for our own obstinacy and misconduct, will bring us all, through various ways, and by various means, to bliss at last.

These are my tenets, my lovely friend; and which, I think, cannot be well disputed. My creed is pretty nearly expressed in the last clause of Jamie Dean's grace, an honest weaver in Ayrshire: "Lord, grant that we may lead a gude life! for a gude life maks a gude end; at least it helps weel."

I am flattered by the entertainment you tell me you have found in my packet. You see me as I have been, you know me as I am, and may guess at what I am likely to be. I too may say, "Talk not of love," &c., for indeed he has "plunged me deep in woe!" Not that I ever saw a woman who pleased unexceptionably, as my Clarinda elegantly says, "in the companion, the friend, and the mistress." One indeed I could except—One, before passion threw its mists over my discern-

ment, I knew—the first of women! Her name is indelibly written in my heart's core—but I dare not look in on it; a degree of agony would be the consequence. Oh! thou perfidious, cruel, mischief-making demon, who presidest over that frantic passion—thou mayest, thou dost poison my peace, but shalt not taint my honour! I would not, for a single moment, give an asylum to the most distant imagination, that would shadow the faintest outline of a selfish gratification, at the expense of *her* whose happiness is twisted with the threads of my existence. May she be happy as she deserves! And if my tenderest, faithfulest friendship can add to her bliss, I shall at least have one solid mine of enjoyment in my bosom! *Don't guess at these ravings!*

I watched at our front window to-day, but was disappointed. It has been a day of disappointments. I am just risen from a two-hours' bout after supper, with silly or sordid souls, who could relish nothing in common with me but the Port. One! 'Tis now the "witching time of night;" and whatever is out of joint in the foregoing scrawl, impute it to enchantments and spells; for I can't look over it, but will seal it up directly, as I don't care for to-morrow's criticisms on it.

You are by this time fast asleep, Clarinda; may good angels attend and guard you as constantly and faithfully as my good wishes do!

"Beauty, which, whether waking or asleep,
Shot forth peculiar graces."

John Milton, I wish thy soul better rest than I expect on my pillow to-night! O for a little of the cart-horse part of human nature! Good night, my dearest Clarinda!

SYLVANDER.

(6.)

TO CLARINDA.

Thursday Noon.

I AM certain I saw you, Clarinda; but you don't look to the proper story for a poet's lodging—

"Where Speculation roosted near the sky."

I could almost have thrown myself over for very vexation. Why didn't you look higher? It has spoiled my peace for this day. To be so near my charming Clarinda; to miss her look while it was searching for me. I am sure the soul is capable of disease, for mine has convulsed itself into an inflammatory fever. I am sorry for your little boy; do let me know to-morrow how he is.

You have converted me, Clarinda (I shall love that name while I live: there is heavenly music in it). Booth and Amelia I know well.* Your sentiments on that subject, as they are on every subject, are just and noble. "To be feelingly alive to kindness, and to unkindness," is a charming female character.

What I said in my last letter, the powers of fuddling society only know for me. By yours, I understand my good star has been partly in my horizon, when I got wild in my reveries. Had that evil planet, which has almost all my life shed its baleful rays on my devoted head, been, as usual, in its zenith, I had certainly blabbed something that would have

pointed out to you the dear object of my tenderest friendship, and, in spite of me, something more. Had that fatal information escaped me, and it was merely chance, or kind stars, that it did not, I had been undone! You would never have written me, except perhaps *once* more! O, I could curse circumstances, and the coarse tie of human laws, which keeps fast what common sense would loose, and which bars that happiness itself cannot give—happiness which otherwise Love and Honor would warrant! But hold—I shall make no more “hair-breadth ‘scapes.”

My friendship, Clarinda, is a life-rent business. My likings are both strong and eternal. I told you I had but one male friend: I have but two female. I should have a third, but she is surrounded by the blandishments of flattery and courtship. Her I register in my heart’s core by Peggy Chalmers. Miss Nimmo can tell you how divine she is. She is worthy of a place in the same bosom with my Clarinda. That is the highest compliment I can pay her.

Farewell, Clarinda! Remember

SYLVANDER.

* [Fielding's novel.]

(7.)

TO CLARINDA.

Saturday Morning [January 12].

YOUR thoughts on religion, Clarinda, shall be welcome. You may perhaps distrust me, when I say 'tis also *my* favourite topic; but mine is the religion of the bosom. I hate the very idea of a controversial divinity; as I firmly believe that every honest, upright man, of whatever sect, will be accepted of the Deity. If your verses, as you seem to hint, contain censure, except you want an occasion to break with me, don't send them. I have a little infirmity in my disposition, that where I fondly love or highly esteem I cannot bear reproach.

“Reverence thyself” is a sacred maxim, and I wish to cherish it. I think I told you Lord Bolingbroke’s saying to Swift—“Adieu, dear Swift! with all thy faults I love thee entirely: make an effort to love me with all mine.” A glorious sentiment, and without which there can be no friendship! I do highly, very highly esteem you indeed, Clarinda—you merit it all! Perhaps, too, I scorn dissimulation! I could fondly love you: judge then, what a maddening sting your reproach would be. “Oh, I have sins to *Heaven*, but none to *you!*!” With what pleasure would I meet you to-day, but I cannot walk to meet the Fly. I hope to be able to see you, *on foot*, about the middle of next week.

I am interrupted—perhaps you are not sorry for it, you will tell me; but I won’t anticipate blame. O Clarinda! did you know how dear to me is your look of kindness, your smile of approbation, you would not, either in prose or verse, risk a censorious remark.

“Curst be the verse, how well soe’er it flow,
That tends to make one worthy man my foe!”

SYLVANDER.

(8.)

TO CLARINDA.

[*January 12.*]

You talk of weeping, Clarinda: some involuntary drops wet your lines as I read them. Offend me, my dearest angel! You cannot offend me,—you never offended me. If you had ever given me the least shadow of offence, so pardon me my God as I forgive Clarinda. I have read yours again; it has blotted my paper. Though I find your letter has agitated me into a violent headache, I shall take a chair and be with you about eight. A friend is to be with us at tea, on my account, which hinders me from coming sooner. Forgive, my dearest Clarinda, my unguarded expressions! For Heaven’s sake, forgive me, or I shall never be able to bear my own mind.

Your unhappy

SYLVANDER.

(9.)

TO CLARINDA.

Monday Evening, 11 o’clock [Jan. 14th].

WHY have I not heard from you, Clarinda? To-day I expected it; and before supper, when a letter to me was announced, my heart danced with rapture; but behold, 'twas some fool, who had taken into his head to turn poet, and made me an offering of the first-fruits of his nonsense. “It is not poetry, but prose run mad.” Did I ever repeat to you an epigram I made on a Mr. Elphinstone, who has given a translation of Martial, a famous Latin poet? The poetry of Elphinstone can only equal his prose notes. I was sitting in a merchant’s shop of my acquaintance, waiting somebody; he put Elphinstone into my hand, and asked my opinion of it. I begged leave to write it on a blank leaf, which I did.

TO MR. ELPHINSTONE, &c.

“O thou whom poesy abhors,
Whom prose has turned out of doors,
Heard’st thou yon groan? proceed no further!
‘Twas laurel’d Martial calling murther!”

I am determined to see you, if at all possible, on Saturday evening. Next week I must sing—

“The night is my departing night,
The morn’s the day I maun awa’:
There’s neither friend nor foe o’ mine
But wishes that I were awa’!

What I hae done for lack o’ wit,
I never, never can reca’;
I hope ye’re a’ my friends as yet,
Gude night, and joy be wi’ you a’!”

If I could see you sooner, I would be so much the happier; but I would not purchase the dearest gratification on earth, if it must be at your expense in worldly censure, far less inward peace!

I shall certainly be ashamed of thus scrawling whole sheets of incoherence. The only unity (a sad word with poets and critics!) in my ideas is CLARINDA. There my heart “reigns and revels.”

“What art thou, Love? whence are those charms,
That thus thou bear’st an universal rule?
For thee the soldier quits his arms,
The king turns slave, the wise man fool.

In vain we chase thee from the field,
And with cool thoughts resist thy yoke;
Next tide of blood, alas! we yield,
And all those high resolves are broke!"

I like to have quotations ready for every occasion. They give one's ideas so pat, and save one the trouble of finding expression adequate to one's feelings. I think it is one of the greatest pleasures attending a poetic genius, that we can give our woes, cares, joys, loves, &c., an embodied form in verse, which, to me, is ever immediate ease. Goldsmith says finely of his muse—

"Thou source of all my bliss and all my woe:
Who found me poor at first, and keep'st me so."

My limb has been so well to-day, that I have gone up and down stairs often without my staff. To-morrow I hope to walk once again on my own legs to dinner. It is only next street. Adieu!

SYLVANDER.

(10.)

TO CLARINDA.

Tuesday Evening [Jan. 15].

THAT you have faults, my Clarinda, I never doubted; but I knew not where they existed, and Saturday night made me more in the dark than ever. O Clarinda! why would you wound my soul, by hinting that last night must have lessened my opinion of you! True, I was "behind the scenes with you;" but what did I see? A bosom glowing with honor and benevolence; a mind ennobled by genius, informed and refined by education and reflection, and exalted by native religion, genuine as in the climes of heaven; a heart formed for all the glorious meltings of friendship, love, and pity. These I saw. I saw the noblest immortal soul creation ever showed me.

I looked long, my dear Clarinda, for your letter; and am vexed that you are complaining. I have not caught you so far wrong as in your idea, that the commerce you have with one friend hurts you, if you cannot tell every tittle of it to another. Why have so injurious a suspicion of a good God, Clarinda, as to think that Friendship and Love, on the sacred inviolate principles of Truth, Honor, and Religion, can be any thing else than an object of his divine approbation?

I have mentioned, in some of my former scrawls, Saturday evening next. Do allow me to wait on you that evening. Oh, my angel! how soon must we part!—and when can we meet again? I look forward on the horrid interval with tearful eyes! What have I not lost by not knowing you sooner? I fear, I fear my acquaintance with you is too short, to make that lasting impression on your heart I could wish.

SYLVANDER.

(11.)

TO CLARINDA.

Sunday Night [Jan. 20th].

THE impertinence of fools has joined with a return of an old indisposition, to make me good for nothing to-day. The paper has lain before me all this evening to write to my dear Clarinda, but—

"Fools rush'd on fools, as waves succeed to waves."

I cursed them in my soul: they sacrilegiously disturbed my meditations on her who holds my heart. What a creature is man! A little alarm last night and to-day, that I am mortal, has made such a revolution on my spirits! There is no philosophy, no divinity, comes half so home to the mind. I have no idea of courage that braves Heaven. 'Tis the wild ravings of an imaginary hero in bedlam. I can no more, Clarinda; I can scarcely hold up my head; but I am happy you don't know it, you would be so uneasy.

SYLVANDER.

Monday Morning.

I am, my lovely friend, much better this morning on the whole; but I have a horrid languor on my spirits.

"Sick of the world and all its joy,
My soul in pining sadness mourns;
Dark scenes of woe my mind employ,
The past and present in their turns."

Have you ever met with a saying of the great and likewise good Mr. Locke, author of the famous Essay on the Human Understanding? He wrote a letter to a friend, directing it "Not to be delivered till after my decease." It ended thus,— "I know you loved me when living, and will preserve my memory now I am dead. All the use to be made of it is, that this life affords no solid satisfaction, but in the consciousness of having done well, and the hopes of another life. Adieu! I leave my best wishes with you.—J. LOCKE."

Clarinda, may I reckon on your friendship for life? I think I may. Thou Almighty Preserver of men! Thy friendship, which hitherto I have too much neglected, to secure it shall, all the future days and nights of my life, be my steady care. The idea of my Clarinda follows:—

"Hide it, my heart, within that close disguise,
Where, mix'd with God's, her loved idea lies."

But I fear inconstancy, the consequent imperfection of human weakness. Shall I meet with a friendship that defies years of absence and the chances and changes of fortune! Perhaps "such things are." One honest man I have great hopes from that way; but who, except a romance writer, would think on a *love* that could promise for life, in spite of distance, absence, chance, and change, and that, too, with slender hopes of fruition?

For my own part, I can say to myself in both requisitions—"Thou art the man." I dare, in cool resolve, I dare declare myself that friend and that lover. If womankind is capable of such things, Clarinda is. I trust that she is; and feel I shall be miserable if she is not. There is not one virtue which gives worth, or one sentiment which does honour to the sex, that she does not possess superior to any woman I ever saw: her exalted mind, aided a little, perhaps, by her situation, is, I think, capable of that nobly-romantic love-enthusiasm. May I see you on Wednesday evening, my dear angel? The next Wednesday again, will, I conjecture, be a hated day to us both. I tremble for censorious remarks, for your sake; but in extraordinary cases, may not usual and useful precaution be a little dispensed with! Three evenings, three swift-winged evenings, with pinions of down, are all tho-

past—I dare not calculate the future. I shall call at Miss Nimmo to-morrow evening; 'twill be a farewell call.

I have written out my last sheet of paper, so I am reduced to my last half sheet. What a strange, mysterious faculty is that thing called imagination! We have no ideas almost at all of another world; but I have often amused myself with visionary schemes of what happiness might be enjoyed by small alterations, alterations that we can fully enter to in this present state of existence. For instance: suppose you and I just as we are at present; the same reasoning powers, sentiments, and even desires; the same fond curiosity for knowledge and remarking observation in our minds; and imagine our bodies free from pain, and the necessary supplies for the wants of nature at all times and easily within our reach. Imagine, further, that we were set free from the laws of gravitation, which bind us to this globe, and could at pleasure fly, without inconvenience, through all the yet unconjectured bounds of creation; what a life of bliss should we lead in our mutual pursuit of virtue and knowledge, and our mutual enjoyment of friendship and love!

I see you laughing at my fairy fancies, and calling me a voluptuous Mahometan; but I am certain I should be a happy creature, beyond anything we call bliss here below: nay, it would be a paradise congenial to you too. Don't you see us hand in hand, or rather my arm about your lovely waist, making our remarks on Sirius, the nearest of the fixed stars; or surveying a comet flaming innoxious by us, as we just now would mark the passing pomp of a travelling monarch; or, in a shady bower of Mercury or Venus, dedicating the hour to love, in mutual converse, relying honour, and revelling endearment, while the most exalted strains of poesy and harmony would be the ready, spontaneous language of our souls! Devotion is the favourite employment of your heart; so is it of mine: what incentives then to, and powers for reverence, gratitude, faith, and hope, in all the fervour of adoration and praise to that Being, whose unsearchable wisdom, power, and goodness, so pervaded, so inspired, every sense and feeling! By this time, I daresay, you will be blessing the neglect of the maid that leaves me destitute of paper.

SYLVANDER.

(12.)

TO CLARINDA.

Thursday Morning [Jan. 24th].

"Unlavish Wisdom never works in vain."

I HAVE been tasking my reason, Clarinda, why a woman, who, for native genius, poignant wit, strength of mind, generous sincerity of soul, and the sweetest female tenderness, is without a peer; and whose personal charms have few, very few parallels among her sex; why, or how, she should fall to the blessed lot of a poor harum-scarum poet, whom Fortune had kept for her particular use to wreak her temper on, whenever she was in ill-humour.

One time I conjectured that, as Fortune is the most capricious jade ever known, she may have taken, not a fit of remorse, but a paroxysm of whim, to raise the poor devil

out of the mire where he had so often and so conveniently served her as a stepping-stone, and given him the most glorious boon she ever had in her gift, merely for the maggot's sake, to see how his fool head and his fool heart will bear it.

At other times, I was vain enough to think that Nature, who has a great deal to say with Fortune, had given the coquettish goddess some such hint as—"Here is a paragon of female excellence, whose equal, in all my former compositions, I never was lucky enough to hit on, and despair of ever doing so again: you have cast her rather in the shades of life. There is a certain poet of my making: among your frolics, it would not be amiss to attach him to this masterpiece of my hand, to give her that immortality among mankind, which no woman of any age ever more deserved, and which few rhymesters of this age are better able to confer."

Evening, Nine o'clock.

I AM here—absolutely unfit to finish my letter—pretty hearty, after a bowl which has been constantly plied since dinner till this moment. I have been with Mr. Schetki the musician, and he has set the song* finely. I have no distinct ideas of anything, but that I have drunk your health twice to-night, and that you are all my soul holds dear in this world.

SYLVANDER.

*["Clarinda, mistress of my soul."]

(13.)

TO CLARINDA.

[*January 25th.*]

CLARINDA, my life, you have wounded my soul. Can I think of your being unhappy, even though it be not described in your pathetic elegance of language, without being miserable? Clarinda, can I bear to be told from you that "you will not see me to-morrow night—that you wish the hour of parting were come!" Do not let us impose on ourselves by sounds. If, in the moment of fond endearment and tender dalliance, I perhaps trespassed against the *letter* of Decorum's law, I appeal, even to you, whether I ever sinned, in the very least degree, against the *spirit* of her strictest statute? But why, my love, talk to me in such strong terms; every word of which cuts me to the very soul? You know a hint, the slightest signification of your wish, is to me a sacred command.

Be reconciled, my angel, to your God, yourself, and me; and I pledge you Sylvander's honour—an oath, I daresay, you will trust without reserve, that you shall never more have reason to complain of his conduct. Now, my love, do not wound our next meeting with any averted looks or restrained caresses. I have marked the line of conduct—a line, I know, exactly to your taste—and which I will inviolably keep; but do not you show the least inclination to make boundaries. Seeming distrust, where you know you may confide, is a cruel sin against sensibility.

"Delicacy, you know, it was which won me to you at once: take care you do not loosen the dearest, most sacred tie that

* F

unites us." Clarinda, I would not have stung *your* soul—I would not have bruised *your* spirit, as that harsh crucifying "Take care" did *mine*; no, not to have gained heaven! Let me again appeal to your dear self, if Sylvander, even when he seemingly half transgressed the laws of decorum, if he did not show more chastised, trembling, faltering delicacy, than the many of the world do in keeping these laws?

Oh Love and Sensibility, ye have conspired against my Peace! I love to madness, and I feel to torture! Clarinda, how can I forgive myself, that I have ever touched a single chord in your bosom with pain! would I do it willingly? Would any consideration, any gratification, make me do so? Oh, did you love like me, you would not, you could not, deny or put off a meeting with the man who adores you;—who would die a thousand deaths before he would injure you; and who must soon bid you a long farewell!

I had proposed bringing my bosom friend, Mr. Ainslie, to-morrow evening, at his strong request, to see you; as he has only time to stay with us about ten minutes, for an engagement. But I shall hear from you: this afternoon, for mercy's sake!—for, till I hear from you, I am wretched. O Clarinda, the tie that binds me to thee is intwisted, incorporated with my dearest threads of life!

SYLVANDER.

(14.)

TO CLARINDA.

[January 26th.]

I WAS on the way, my *Love*, to meet you (I never do things by halves), when I got your card. Mr. Ainslie goes out of town to-morrow morning, to see a brother of his who is newly arrived from France. I am determined that he and I shall call on you together. So, look you, lest I should never see to-morrow, we will call on you to-night. Mary and you may put off tea till about seven; at which time, in the Galloway phrase, "an the beast be to the fore, and the branks bide hale," expect the humblest of your humble servants, and his dearest friend. We only propose staying half an hour—"for ought we ken." I could suffer the lash of misery eleven months in the year, were the twelfth to be composed of hours like yesternight. You are the soul of my enjoyment; all else is of the stuff of stocks and stones.

SYLVANDER.

(15.)

TO CLARINDA.

Sunday, Noon [Jan. 27th].

I HAVE almost given up the Excise idea. I have been just now to wait on a great person, Miss —'s friend, —. Why will great people not only deafen us with the din of their equipage, and dazzle us with their fastidious pomp, but they must also be so very dictatorially wise? I have been questioned like a child about my matters, and blamed and schooled for my Inscription on Stirling window. Come, Clarinda!—"Come, curse me, Jacob; come, defy me, Israel!"

Sunday Night.

I have been with Miss Nimmo. She is, indeed, "a good soul," as my Clarinda finely says. She has reconciled me, in a good measure, to the world with her friendly prattle.

Schetki has sent me the song, set to a fine air of his composing. I have called the song Clarinda: I have carried it about in my pocket, and thumbed it over all day.

Monday Morning.

If my prayers have any weight in heaven, this morning looks in on you and finds you in the arms of peace, except where it is charmingly interrupted by the arduous of devotion. I find so much serenity of mind, so much positive pleasure, so much fearless daring toward the world, when I warm in devotion, or feel the glorious sensation—a consciousness of Almighty friendship—that I am sure I shall soon be an honest enthusiast.

"How are thy servants blest, O Lord!
How sure is their defence!
Eternal Wisdom is their guide,
Their help, Omnipotence."

I am, my dear Madam, yours,

SYLVANDER.

(16.)

TO CLARINDA.

Sunday Morning [January 27th].

I HAVE just been before the throne of my God, Clarinda. According to my association of ideas, my sentiments of love and friendship, I next devote myself to you. Yesternight I was happy—happiness "that the world cannot give." I kindle at the recollection; but it is a flame where Innocence looks smiling on, and Honour stands by a sacred guard. Your heart, your fondest wishes, your dearest thoughts, these are yours to bestow: your person is unapproachable, by the laws of your country; and he loves not as I do who would make you miserable.

You are an angel, Clarinda: you are surely no mortal that "the earth owns."—To kiss your hand, to live on your smile, is to me far more exquisite bliss than any the dearest favours that the fairest of the sex, yourself excepted, can bestow.

Sunday Evening.

You are the constant companion of my thoughts. How wretched is the condition of one who is haunted with conscious guilt, and trembling under the idea of dreaded vengeance! And what a placid calm, what a charming secret enjoyment is given to one's bosom by the kind feelings of friendship, and the fond throes of love! Out upon the tempest of Anger, the acrimonious gall of fretful Impatience, the sullen frost of louring Resentment, or the corroding poison of withered Envy! They eat up the immortal part of man! If they spent their fury only on the unfortunate objects of them, it would be something in their favour; but these miserable passions, like traitor Iscariot, betray their Lord and Master.

Thou Almighty Author of peace, and goodness, and love! do Thou give me the social heart that kindly tastes of every man's cup! Is it a draught of joy?—warm and open my heart, to share it with cordial unenvying rejoicing! Is it the bitter potion of sorrow?—melt my heart with sincerely sympathetic woe! Above all, do Thou give me the manly mind, that resolutely exemplifies, in life and manners, those sentiments which I would wish to be thought to possess! The friend of my soul—there may I never deviate from the firmest fidelity and most active kindness! Clarinda, the dear object of my fondest love; there, may the most sacred inviolate honour, the most faithful kindling constancy, ever watch and animate my every thought and imagination!

Did you ever meet with the following lines spoken of Religion, your darling topic?

'Tis this, my friend, that streaks our morning bright
'Tis this that gilds the horrors of our night;
When wealth forsakes us, and when friends are few,
When friends are faithless, or when foes pursue;
'Tis this that wards the blow, or stills the smart,
Disarms affliction, or repels its dart;
Within the breast bids purest rapture rise,
Bids smiling Conscience spread her cloudless skies.

I met with these verses very early in life, and was so delighted with them, that I have them by me, copied at school.

Good night and sound rest, my dearest Clarinda!

SYLVANDER.

(17.)

TO CLARINDA.

Thursday Night [January 31st].

I CANNOT be easy, my Clarinda, while any sentiment respecting me in your bosom gives you pain. If there is no man on earth to whom your heart and affections are justly due, it may savour of imprudence, but never of criminality, to bestow that heart and those affections where you please. The God of love meant and made those delicious attachments to be bestowed on somebody; and even all the imprudence lies in bestowing them on an unworthy object. If this reasoning is conclusive, as it certainly is, I must be allowed to "talk of Love."

It is, perhaps, rather wrong to speak highly to a friend of his letter; it is apt to lay one under a little restraint in their future letters, and restraint is the death of a friendly epistle; but there is one passage in your last charming letter, Thomson nor Shenstone never exceeded it, nor often came up to it. I shall certainly steal it, and set it in some future poetic production, and get immortal fame by it. 'Tis when you bid the scenes of nature remind me of Clarinda. Can I forget you, Clarinda? I would detest myself as a tasteless, unfeeling, insipid, infamous blockhead! I have loved women of ordinary merit, whom I could have loved for ever. You are the first, the only unexceptionable individual of the beauteous sex that I ever met with; and never woman more entirely possessed my soul. I know myself, and how far I can depend on passions, well. It has been my peculiar study.

I thank you for going to Miers.* Urge him, for necessity calls, to have it done by the middle of next week: Wednesday the latest day. I want it for a breast pin, to wear next my heart. I propose to keep sacred set times, to wander in the woods and wilds for meditation on you. Then, and only then, your lovely image shall be produced to the day, with a reverence akin to devotion.

* * * * *

To-morrow night shall not be the last. Good night! I am perfectly stupid, as I supped late yesternight.

SYLVANDER.

* [A celebrated miniature painter of that time. A profile of Burns by him appears in Hogg and Motherwell's edition; and a profile of Clarinda, we presume by him also, appears in frontispiece to the Correspondence with her.]

(18.)

TO CLARINDA.

Saturday Morning [Feb. 2d].

THERE is no time, my Clarinda, when the conscious thrilling chords of Love and Friendship give such delight, as in the pensive hours of what our favourite Thomson calls, "philosophic melancholy." The sportive insects, who bask in the sunshine of Prosperity, or the worms that luxuriant crawl amid their ample wealth of earth; they need no Clarinda—they would despise Sylvander, if they dared. The family of Misfortune, a numerous group of brothers and sisters!—they need a resting-place to their souls. Unnoticed, often condemned by the world—in some degree, perhaps, condemned by themselves—they feel the full enjoyment of ardent love, delicate tender endearments, mutual esteem and mutual reliance.

In this light I have often admired religion. In proportion as we are wrung with grief, or distracted with anxiety, the ideas of a compassionate Deity, an Almighty Protector, are doubly dear.

"'Tis this, my friend, that streaks our morning bright;
'Tis this that gilds the horrors of our night."

I have been this morning taking a peep through, as Young finely says, "the dark postern of time long elapsed;" and you will easily guess 'twas a rueful prospect: what a tissue of thoughtlessness, weakness, and folly! My life reminded me of a ruined temple: what strength, what proportion in some parts!—what unsightly gaps, what prostrate ruins in others! I kneeled down before the Father of Mercies, and said, "Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son!" I rose eased and strengthened. I despise the superstition of a fanatic; but I love the religion of a man. "The future," said I to myself, "is still before me" there let me

"On reason build resolve—
That column of true majesty in man!"

I have difficulties many to encounter," said I; "but they are not absolutely insuperable:—and where is firmness of mind shown, but in exertion? Mere declamation is bombast rant. Besides, wherever I am, or in whatever situation I may be,

— “Tis nought to me,
Since God is ever present, ever felt;
In the void waste as in the city full;
And where he vital breathes, there must be joy.”

Saturday Night, Half after Ten.

WHAT luxury of bliss I was enjoying this time yesternight! My ever dearest Clarinda, you have stolen away my soul: but you have refined, you have exalted it; you have given it a stronger sense of virtuo, and a stronger relish for piety. Clarinda, first of your sex! if ever I am the veriest wretch on earth to forget you; if ever your lovely image is effaced from my soul,

“May I be lost, no eye to weep my end,
And find no earth that’s base enough to bury me!”

What trifling silliness is the childish fondness of the everyday children of the world! ‘Tis the unmeaning toying of the younglings of the fields and forests; but, where Sentiment and Fancy unite their sweets, where Taste and Delicacy refine, where Wit adds the flavour, and Good Sense gives strength and spirit to all; what a delicious draught is the hour of tender endearment! Beauty and Grace in the arms of Truth and Honour, in all the luxury of mutual love.

Clarinda, have you ever seen the picture realised? not in all its very richest colouring, but

“Hope, thou nurse of young Desire,
Fair promiser of Joy.”—

Last night, Clarinda, but for one slight shade, was the glorious picture—

— “Innocence
Look’d gaily smiling on; while rosy Pleasure
Hid young Desire amid her flowery wreath,
And pour’d her cup luxuriant, mantling high,
The sparkling, Heavenly vintage—Love and Bliss!”

Clarinda, when a poet and poetess of Nature’s making—two of Nature’s noblest productions!—when they drink together of the same cup of Love and Bliss, attempt not, ye coarser stuff of human nature! profanely to measure enjoyment ye never can know.

Good Night, my dear Clarinda!

SYLVANDER.

store for me, as an equal return of affection from her who, Thou knowest, is dearer to me than life, do Thou bless and hallow our band of love and friendship; watch over us, in all our outgoings and incomings, for good; and may the tie that unites our hearts be strong and indissoluble as the thread of man’s immortal life!

I am just going to take your Blackbird,* the sweetest, I am sure, that ever sung, and prune its wings a little.

SYLVANDER.

*[Song by Clarinda.]

(20.)

TO CLARINDA.

[February 5th.]

I CANNOT go out to-day, my dearest Love, without sending you half a line, by way of a sin-offering; but, believe me, ‘twas the sin of ignorance. Could you think that I intended to hurt you by any thing I said yesternight? Nature has been too kind to you for your happiness, your delicacy, your sensibility. O why should such glorious qualifications be the fruitful source of woe! You have “murdered sleep” to me last night. I went to bed, impressed with an idea that you were unhappy; and every start I closed my eyes, busy Fancy painted you in such scenes of romantic misery, that I would almost be persuaded you were not well this morning.

— “If I unwitting have offended,
Impute it not,”

— “But while we live
But one short hour, perhaps, between us two
Let there be peace.”

If Mary is not gone by the time this reaches you, give her my best compliments. She is a charming girl, and highly worthy of the noblest love.

I send you a poem to read till I call on you this night, which will be about nine. I wish I could procure some potent spell, some fairy charm, that would protect from injury, or restore to rest that bosom chord, “tremblingly alive all o’er,” on which hangs your peace of mind. I thought, vainly I fear thought, that the devotion of love, love strong as even you can feel, love guarded, invulnerably guarded by all the purity of virtue, and all the pride of honour,—I thought such a love might make you happy. Shall I be mistaken? I can no more, for hurry.

Tuesday Morning.

—

(19.) TO CLARINDA.

[February 4th, 1788.]

* * * I am a discontented ghost, a perturbed spirit. Clarinda, if ever you forget Sylvander, may you be happy, but he will be miserable.

O, what a fool I am in love!—what an extravagant prodigal of affection! Why are your sex called the tender sex, when I never have met with one who can repay me in passion? They are either not so rich in love as I am, or they are niggards where I am lavish.

O Thou, whose I am, and whose are all my ways! Thou see’st me here, the hapless wreck of tides and tempests in my own bosom: do Thou direct to thyself that ardent love, for which I have so often sought a return, in vain, from my fellow-creatures! If thy goodness has yet such a gift in

(21.)

TO CLARINDA.

Friday Morning, 7 o’Clock [February 8th].

YOUR fears for Mary are truly laughable. I suppose, my love, you and I showed her a scene which, perhaps, made her wish that she had a swain, and one who could love like me; and ‘tis a thousand pities that so good a heart as hers should want an aim, an object. I am miserably stupid this morning. Yesterday I dined with a Baronet, and sat pretty late over the bottle. And “who hath wo—who hath sorrow? they that

tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine." Forgive me, likewise, a quotation from my favourite author. Solomon's knowledge of the world is very great. He may be looked on as the "Spectator" or "Adventurer" of his day: and it is, indeed, surprising what a sameness has ever been in human nature. The broken, but strongly characterizing hints, that the royal author gives us of the manners of the court of Jerusalem and country of Israel are, in their great outlines, the same pictures that London and England, Versailles and France exhibit some three thousand years later. The loves in the "Song of songs" are all in the spirit of Lady M. W. Montague, or Madame Ninon de l'Enclos; though, for my part, I dislike both the ancient and modern voluptuaries; and will dare to affirm, that such an attachment as mine to Clarinda, and such evenings as she and I have spent, are what these greatly respectable and deeply experienced Judges of Life and Love never dreamed of.

I shall be with you this evening between eight and nine, and shall keep as sober hours as you could wish. I am ever, my dear Madam, yours,

SYLVANDER.

(22.)

TO CLARINDA.

[February 13th.]

MY EVER DEAREST CLARINDA,—I make a numerous dinner-party wait me while I read yours and write this. Do not require that I should cease to love you, to adore you in my soul; 'tis to me impossible: your peace and happiness are to me dearer than my soul. Name the terms on which you wish to see me, to correspond with me, and you have them. I must love, pine, mourn, and adore in secret: this you must not deny me. You will ever be to me

"Dear as the light that visits those sad eyes,
Dear as the ruddy drops that warm my heart."

I have not patience to read the Puritanic scrawl. Damned sophistry. Ye heavens, thou God of nature, thou Redeemer of mankind! ye look down with approving eyes on a passion inspired by the purest flame, and guarded by truth, delicacy, and honour; but the half-inch soul of an unfeeling, cold-blooded, pitiful Presbyterian bigot cannot forgive anything above his dungeon-bosom and foggy head.

Farewell! I'll be with you to-morrow evening; and be at rest in your mind. I will be yours in the way you think most to your happiness. I dare not proceed. I love, and will love you; and will, with joyous confidence, approach the throne of the Almighty Judge of men with your dear idea; and will despise the scum of sentiment, and the mist of sophistry.

SYLVANDER.

(23.)

TO CLARINDA.

Wednesday, Midnight [February 13th].

MADAM,—After a wretched day, I am preparing for a sleepless night. I am going to address myself to the Almighty Witness of my actions—some time, perhaps very

soon, my Almighty Judge. I am not going to be the advocate of Passion: be Thou my inspirer and testimony, O God, as I plead the cause of truth!

I have read over your friend's haughty dictatorial letter: you are only answerable to your God in such a matter. Who gave any fellow-creature of yours (a fellow-creature incapable of being your judge, because not your peer), a right to catechise, scold, undervalue, abuse, and insult, wantonly and unhumanly to insult you thus? I don't wish, not even wish to deceive you, Madam. The Searcher of hearts is my witness how dear you are to me; but though it were possible you could be still dearer to me, I would not even kiss your hand, at the expense of your conscience. Away with declamation! let us appeal to the bar of common sense. It is not mouthing everything sacred; it is not vague ranting assertions; it is not assuming, haughtily and insultingly assuming, the dictatorial language of a Roman Pontiff, that must dissolve a union like ours. Tell me, Madam, are you under the least shadow of an obligation to bestow your love, tenderness, caresses, affections, heart and soul, on Mr. M'Lehose—the man who has repeatedly, habitually, and barbarously broken through every tie of duty, nature, or gratitude to you? The laws of your country indeed, for the most useful reasons of policy and sound government, have made your person inviolate; but are your heart and affections bound to one who gives not the least return of either to you? You cannot do it; it is not in the nature of things that you are bound to do it; the common feelings of humanity forbid it. Have you, then, a heart and affections which are no man's right? You have. It would be highly, ridiculously absurd to suppose the contrary. Tell me then, in the name of common sense, can it be wrong, is such a supposition compatible with the plainest ideas of right and wrong, that it is improper to bestow the heart and these affections on another—while that bestowing is not in the smallest degree hurtful to your duty to God, to your children, to yourself, or to society at large?

This is the great test; the consequences: let us see them. In a widowed, forlorn, lonely situation, with a bosom glowing with love and tenderness, yet so delicately situated that you cannot indulge these nobler feelings except you meet with a man who has a soul capable * * * * *

(24.)

TO CLARINDA.

[February 14th.]

"I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan." I have suffered, Clarinda, from your letter. My soul was in arms at the sad perusal. I dreaded that I had acted wrong. If I have wronged you, God forgive me. But, Clarinda, be comforted. Let us raise the tone of our feelings a little higher and bolder. A fellow-creature who leaves us—who spurns us without just cause, though once our bosom friend—up with a little honest pride: let them go. How shall I comfort you, who am the cause of the injury? Can I wish that I had never seen you—that we had never met? No, I never will. But have I

thrown you friendless?—there is almost distraction in the thought. Father of mercies! against Thee often have I sinned: through Thy grace I will endeavour to do so no more. She who, Thou knowest, is dearer to me than myself—pour Thou the balm of peace into her past wounds, and hedge her about with Thy peculiar care, all her future days and nights. Strengthen her tender noble mind, firmly to suffer and magnanimously to bear. Make me worthy of that friendship, that love she honours me with. May my attachment to her be pure as devotion, and lasting as immortal life. O Almighty Goodness, hear me! Be to her at all times, particularly in the hour of distress or trial, a friend and comforter, a guide and guard.

"How are thy servants blest, O Lord,
How sure is their defence!
Eternal Wisdom is their guide,
Their help, Omnipotence!"

Forgive me, Clarinda, the injury I have done you. To-night I shall be with you, as indeed I shall be ill at ease till I see you.

SYLVANDER.

(25.)

TO CLARINDA.

Two o'clock [February 14th].

I JUST now received your first letter of yesterday, by the careless negligence of the penny-post. Clarinda, matters are grown very serious with us: then seriously hear me, and hear me, Heaven!

I met you, my dear [Clarinda], by far the first of woman kind, at least to me. I esteemed, I loved you at first sight: both of which attachments you have done me the honour to return. The longer I am acquainted with you, the more innate amiableness and worth I discover in you. You have suffered a loss, I confess, for my sake; but if the firmest, steadiest, warmest friendship; if every endeavour to be worthy of your friendship; if a love, strong as the ties of nature, and holy as the duties of religion; if all these can make any thing like a compensation for the evil I have occasioned you; if they be worth your acceptance, or can in the least add to your enjoyments—so help Sylvander, ye Powers above, in his hour of need, as he freely gives these all to Clarinda!

I esteem you, I love you as a friend; I admire you, I love you as a woman, beyond any one in all the circle of creation. I know I shall continue to esteem you, to love you, to pray for you, nay, to pray for myself for your sake.

Expect me at eight; and believe me to be ever, my dearest Madam, yours most entirely,

SYLVANDER.

(26.)

TO CLARINDA.

[February 15th.]

WHEN matters, my love, are desperate, we must put on a desperate face—

—"On reason build resolve,
That column of true majesty in man"—

or, as the same author finely says in another place,

—"Let the soul spring up,
And lay strong hold for help on Him that made thee."

I am yours, Clarinda, for life. Never be discouraged at all this. Look forward: in a few weeks I shall be somewhere or other out of the possibility of seeing you: till then, I shall write you often, but visit you seldom. Your fame, your welfare, your happiness, are dearer to me than any gratification whatever. Be comforted, my love! the present moment is the worst: the lenient hand of Time is daily and hourly either lightening the burden, or making us insensible to the weight. None of these friends—I mean Mr. _____ and the other gentleman—can hurt your worldly support: and of their friendship, in a little time you will learn to be easy and, by and by, to be happy without it. A decent means of livelihood in the world, an approving God, a peaceful conscience, and one firm trusty friend—can any body that has these be said to be unhappy? These are yours.

To-morrow evening I shall be with you about eight; probably for the last time till I return to Edinburgh. In the meantime, should any of these two unlucky friends question you respecting me, whether I am *the man*, I do not think they are entitled to any information. As to their jealousy and spying, I despise them.

Adieu, my dearest Madam!

SYLVANDER.

(27.)

TO CLARINDA.

*Glasgow, Monday Evening, Nine o'clock
[February 18th].*

THE attraction of Love, I find, is in an inverse proportion to the attraction of the Newtonian philosophy. In the system of Sir Isaac, the nearer objects were to one another, the stronger was the attractive force. In my system, every milestone that marked my progress from Clarinda awakened a keener pang of attachment to her. How do you feel, my love? Is your heart ill at ease? I fear it. God forbid that these persecutors should harass that peace, which is more precious to me than my own. Be assured I shall ever think on you, muse on you, and in my moments of devotion, pray for you. The hour that you are not in all my thoughts, "be that hour darkness; let the shadows of death cover it; let it not be numbered in the hours of the day!"

—"When I forget the darling theme,
Be my tongue mute! my fancy paint no more!
And, dead to joy, forget my heart to beat!"

I have just met with my old friend, the ship Captain*—guess my pleasure; to meet you could alone have given me more. My brother William, too, the young saddler, has come to Glasgow to meet me; and here are we three spending the evening.

I arrived here too late to write by post; but I'll wrap half a dozen sheets of blank paper together, and send it by the Fly, under the name of a parcel. You shall hear from me next post town. I would write you a longer letter, but for the present circumstances of my friend.

Adieu, my Clarinda! I am just going to propose your health by way of grace-drink.

SYLVANDER.

*[Mr. Richard Brown, alluded to in the Poet's autobiography as "a very noble character, but a hapless son of Misfortune," whose acquaintance he had formed at Irvine.]

(28.)

TO CLARINDA.

Kilmarnock, Friday [February 22d].

I WROTE you, my dear Madam, the moment I alighted in Glasgow. Since then I have not had opportunity: for in Paisley, where I arrived next day, my worthy, wise friend, Mr. Pattison, did not allow me a moment's respite. I was there ten hours; during which time I was introduced to nine men worth six thousands; five men worth ten thousands; his brother, richly worth twenty thousands; and a young weaver, who will have thirty thousands good when his father, who has no more children than the said weaver, and a Whig-kirk, dies. Mr. P. was bred a zealous Antiburgher; but, during his widowerhood, he has found their strictness incompatible with certain compromises he is often obliged to make with those Powers of darkness—the devil, the world, and the flesh: so he, good, merciful man! talked privately to me of the absurdity of eternal torments; the liberality of sentiment in indulging the honest instincts of nature; the mysteries of * * * &c. He has a son, however, that, at sixteen, has repeatedly minted* at certain privileges, only proper for sober, staid men, who can use the good things of this life without abusing them; but the father's parental vigilance has hitherto hedged him in, amid a corrupt and evil world.

His only daughter, who, "if the beast be to the fore, and the branks bide hale," will have seven thousand pounds when her old father steps into the dark Factory-office of Eternity with his well-thummed web of life, has put him again and again in a commendable fit of indignation, by requesting a harpsichord. "O! these boarding-schools!" exclaims my prudent friend. "She was a good spinner and sewer, till I was advised by her foes and mine to give her a year of Edinburgh!"

After two bottles more, my much-respected friend opened up to me a project, a legitimate child of Wisdom and Good Sense; 'twas no less than a long thought-on and deeply-matured design to marry a girl, fully as elegant in her form as the famous priestess whom Saul consulted in his last hours, and who had been second maid of honour to his deceased wife. This, you may be sure, I highly applauded, so I hope for a pair of gloves by and by. I spent the two bypast days at Dunlop House with that worthy family to whom I was deeply indebted early in my poetic career; and in about two hours I shall present your "twa wee sarkies" to the little fellow.† My dearest Clarinda, you are ever present with me; and these hours, that drawl by among the fools and rascals of this world, are only supportable in the idea,

that they are the forerunners of that happy hour that ushers me to "the mistress of my soul." Next week I shall visit Dumfries, and next again return to Edinburgh. My letters, in these hurrying dissipated hours, will be heavy trash; but you know the writer.

God bless you.

SYLVANDER.

*[*Anglice*—Aimed at, attempted.]

+[Some little gift to the Poet's eldest son, then an infant, and of whose birth Clarinda was already informed (4.), is here referred to. She sent kisses also to "the little cherub," and speaks of him afterwards as "your little lamb."]

(29.)

TO CLARINDA.

Cumnock, 2d March, 1788.

I HOPE, and am certain, that my generous Clarinda will not think my silence, for now a long week, has been in any degree owing to my forgetfulness. I have been tossed about through the country ever since I wrote you; and am here returning from Dumfries-shire, at an inn, the post-office of the place, with just so long time as my horse eats his corn, to write you. I have been hurried with business and dissipation, almost equal to the insidious degree of the Persian monarch's mandate, when he forbade asking petition of God or man for forty days. Had the venerable prophet been as strong as I, he had not broken the decree; at least not thrice a day.

I am thinking my farming scheme will yet hold. A worthy intelligent farmer, my father's friend and my own, has been with me on the spot: he thinks the bargain practicable. I am myself, on a more serious review of the lands, much better pleased with them. I won't mention this in writing to anybody but you and Mr. Ainslie. Don't accuse me of being fickle; I have the two plans of life before me, and I wish to adopt the one most likely to procure me independence.

I shall be in Edinburgh next week. I long to see you; your image is omnipresent to me; nay, I am convinced I would soon idolatize it most seriously; so much do absence and memory improve the medium through which one sees the much-loved object. To-night, at the sacred hour of eight, I expect to meet you, at the Throne of Grace. I hope as I go home to-night, to find a letter from you at the post-office in Mauchline; I have just once seen that dear hand since I left Edinburgh; a letter, indeed, which much affected me. Tell me, first of womankind, will my warmest attachment, my sincerest friendship, my correspondence,—will they be any compensation for the sacrifices you make for my sake? If they will, they are yours. If I settle on the farm I propose, I am just a day and a half's ride from Edinburgh. We shall meet: don't you say, "Perhaps, too often!"

Farewell, my fair, my charming Poetess! May all good things ever attend you.

I am ever, my dearest Madam,

Yours,

SYLVANDER.

(30.)

TO CLARINDA.

[March 6th.]

I OWN myself guilty, Clarinda: I should have written you last week. But when you recollect, my dearest Madam, that yours of this night's post is only the third I have from you, and that this is the fifth or sixth I have sent to you, you will not reproach me, with a good grace, for unkindness. I have always some kind of idea, not to sit down to write a letter, except I have time and possession of my faculties, so as to do some justice to my letter; which at present is rarely my situation. For instance, yesterday I dined at a friend's at some distance; the savage hospitality of this country spent me the most part of the night over the nauseous potion in the bowl. This day—sick—headache—low spirits—miserable—fasting, except for a draught of water or small beer. Now eight o'clock at night; only able to crawl ten minutes' walk into Mauchline to wait the post, in the pleasurable hope of hearing from the mistress of my soul.

But true with all this. When I sit down to write to you, all is happiness and peace. A hundred times a-day do I figure you before your taper,—your book or work laid aside as I get within the room. How happy have I been! and how little of that scantling portion of time, called the life of man, is sacred to happiness, much less transport.

I could moralize to-night, like a death's head.

"O what is life, that thoughtless wish of all!
A drop of honey in a draught of gall."

Nothing astonishes me more, when a little sickness clogs the wheels of life, than the thoughtless career we run in the hour of health. "None saith, Where is God, my Maker, that giveth songs in the night: who teacheth us more knowledge than the beasts of the field, and more understanding than the fowls of the air?"

Give me, my Maker, to remember thee! Give me to act up to the dignity of my nature! Give me to feel "another's wo;" and continue with me that dear-lov'd friend that feels with mine!

The dignifying and dignified consciousness of an honest man, and the well-grounded trust in approving Heaven, are two most substantial foundations of happiness.

* * * * *

I could not have written a page to any mortal, except yourself. I'll write you by Sunday's post. Adieu. Good night.

SYLVANDER.

(31.)

TO CLARINDA.

Mossiel, 7th March, 1788.

CLARINDA, I have been so stung with your reproach for unkindness—a sin so unlike me, a sin I detest more than a breach of the whole Decalogue, fifth, sixth, seventh, and ninth articles excepted—that I believe I shall not rest in my grave about it, if I die before I see you. You have often allowed me the head to judge, and the heart to feel the influence of female excellence: was it not blasphemy, then, against your own charms, and against my feelings, to suppose that a short

fortnight could abate my passion? You, my love, may have your cares and anxieties to disturb you; but they are the usual occurrences of life: your future views are fixed, and your mind in a settled routine. Could not you, my ever dearest Madam, make a little allowance for a man, after long absence, paying a short visit to a country full of friends, relations, and early intimates? Cannot you guess, my Clarinda, what thoughts, what cares, what anxious forebodings, hopes and fears, must crowd the breast of the man of keen sensibility, when no less is on the tapis than his aim, his employment, his very existence through future life?

To be overtapped in any thing else, I can bear; but in the tests of generous love, I defy all mankind! not even the tender, the fond, the loving Clarinda—she whose strength of attachment, whose melting soul, may vie with Eloisa and Sappho, not even she can overpay the affection she owes me!

Now that, not my apology, but my defence, is made, I feel my soul respire more easily. I know you will go along with me in my justification: would to Heaven you could in my adoption too! I mean an adoption beneath the stars—an adoption where I might revel in the immediate beams of

"She, the bright sun of all her sex."

I would not have you, my dear Madam, so much hurt at Miss N[immo]'s coldness. 'Tis placing yourself below her, an honour she by no means deserves. We ought, when we wish to be economists in happiness,—we ought, in the first place, to fix the standard of our own character; and when, on full examination, we know where we stand, and how much ground we occupy, let us contend for it as property; and those who seem to doubt, or deny us what is justly ours, let us either pity their prejudices, or despise their judgment. I know, my dear, you will say this is self-conceit; but I call it self-knowledge. The one is the overweening opinion of a fool, who fancies himself to be what he wishes himself to be thought; the other is the honest justice that a man of sense, who has thoroughly examined the subject, owes to himself. Without this standard, this column in our own mind, we are perpetually at the mercy of the petulance, the mistakes, the prejudices, nay, the very weakness and wickedness of our fellow-creatures.

I urge this, my dear, both to confirm myself in the doctrine, which, I assure you, I sometimes need; and because I know that this causes you often much disquiet. To return to Miss N——. She is most certainly a worthy soul; and equalled by very, very few, in goodness of heart. But can she boast more goodness of heart than Clarinda? Not even prejudice will dare to say so. For penetration and discernment, Clarinda sees far beyond her. To wit, Miss N—— dare make no pretence: to Clarinda's wit, scarce any of her sex dare make pretence. Personal charms, it would be ridiculous to run the parallel: and for conduct in life, Miss N—— was never called out, either much to do, or to suffer. Clarinda has been both; and has performed her part, where Miss N—— would have sunk at the bare idea.

Away, then, with these disquietudes! Let us pray with the honest weaver of Kilbarchan, "Lord, send us a gude conceit o' oursel!" or, in the words of the auld sang,

"Who does me disdain, I can scorn them again,
And I'll never mind any such foes."

There is an error in the commerce of intimacy. *

way of exchange, have not an equivalent to give us; and, what is still worse, have no idea of the value of our goods. Happy is our lot, indeed, when we meet with an honest merchant, who is qualified to deal with us on our own terms; but that is a rarity: with almost every body we must pocket our pearls, less or more; and learn, in the old Scots phrase, "To gie sic like as we get." For this reason, we should try to erect a kind of bank or storehouse in our own mind; or, as the Psalmist says, "We should commune with our own hearts, and be still." This is exactly

I wrote you yesternight, which will meet you long before this can. I may write Mr. Ainslie before I see him, but I am not sure.

Farewell! and remember

SYLVANDER.

(32.)

TO CLARINDA.

[31st March.]

I WILL meet you to-morrow, Clarinda, as you appoint. My Excise affair is just concluded, and I have got my order for instructions: so far good. Wednesday night I am engaged to sup among some of the principals of the Excise: so can only make a call for you that evening; but next day, I stay to dine with one of the Commissioners, so cannot go till Friday morning.

Your hopes, your fears, your cares, my love, are mine; so don't mind them. I will take you in my hand through the dreary wilds of this world, and scare away the ravening bird or beast that would annoy you. I saw Mary in town to-day, and asked her if she had seen you. I shall certainly bespeak Mr. Ainslie as you desire.

Excuse me, my dearest angel, this hurried scrawl and miserable paper; circumstances make both. Farewell till to-morrow.

SYLVANDER.

Monday, Noon.

(33.)

TO CLARINDA.

[8th April.]

I AM just hurrying away to wait on the Great Man, Clarinda; but I have more respect to my own peace and happiness, than to set out without waiting on you; for my imagination, like a child's favourite bird, will fondly flutter along with this scrawl, till it perch on your bosom. I thank you for all the happiness you bestowed on me yesterday. The walk—delightful; the evening—rapture. Do not be uneasy to-day, Clarinda; forgive me. I am in rather better spirits to-day, though I had but an indifferent night. Care, anxiety, sat on my spirits; and all the cheerfulness of this morning is the fruit of some serious, important ideas that lie, in their

realities, beyond "the dark and the narrow house," as Ossian, prince of poets, says. The Father of Mercies be with you, Clarinda! and every good thing attend you!

SYLVANDER.

Tuesday Morning.

(34.)

TO CLARINDA.

[This letter is printed from copy of original in possession of George Manners, Esq., F.S.A., Croydon, to whom we are indebted for other similar favours (see letter to Mrs. Dunlop (21).]

Wednesday Morning [9th April].

CLARINDA, will that envious night-cap hinder you from appearing at the window as I pass? "Who is she that looketh forth as the morning; fair as the sun, clear as the moon, terrible as an army with banners?"

Do not accuse me of fond folly for this line; you know I am a cool lover. I mean by these presents greeting, to let you to wit, that arch-rasc—, Cr—ch, has not done my business yesternight, which has put off my leaving town till Monday morning. To-morrow, at eleven, I meet with him for the last time; just the hour I should have met far more agreeable company.

You will tell me this evening, whether you cannot make our hour of meeting to-morrow one o'clock. I have just now written Creech such a letter, that the very goose-feather in my hand shrunk back from the line, and seemed to say, "I exceedingly fear and quake!" I am forming ideal schemes of vengeance. O for a little of my will on him! I just wished that he loved as I do—as glorious an object as Clarinda—and that he were doomed

* * * * *

Adieu, and think on

SYLVANDER.

(35.)

TO CLARINDA.

Friday, Nine o'clock, Night [11th April].

I AM just now come in, and have read your letter. The first thing I did was to thank the Divine Disposer of events, that he has had such happiness in store for me as the connexion I have with you. Life, my Clarinda, is a weary, barren path; and wo be to him or her that ventures on it alone! For me, I have my dearest partner of my soul: Clarinda and I will make out our pilgrimage together. Wherever I am, I shall constantly let her know how I go on, what I observe in the world around me, and what adventures I meet with. Will it please you, my love, to get, every week, or, at least, every fortnight, a packet, two or three sheets, full of remarks, nonsense, news, rhymes, and old songs?

Will you open, with satisfaction and delight, a letter from a man who loves you, who has loved you, and who will love you to death, through death, and for ever? Oh Clarinda! what do I owe to Heaven for blessing me with such a piece of exalted excellence as you! I call over your idea, as a miser counts over his treasure! Tell me, were you studious to

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please me last night? I am sure you did it to transport. How rich am I who have such a treasure as you! You know me; you know how to make me happy, and you do it most effectually. God bless you with

"Long life, long youth, long pleasure, and a friend!"

To-morrow night, according to your own direction, I shall watch the window: 'tis the star that guides me to paradise. The great relish to all is, that Honour, that Innocence, that Religion, are the witnesses and guarantees of our happiness. "The Lord God knoweth," and, perhaps, "Israel he shall know," my love and your merit. Adieu, Clarinda! I am going to remember you in my prayers.

SYLVANDER.

(36.)

TO CLARINDA.

March 9th, 1789.

MADAM,—The letter you wrote me to Heron's carried its own answer in its bosom; you forbade me to write you, unless I was willing to plead guilty to a certain indictment that you were pleased to bring against me. As I am convinced of my own innocence, and, though conscious of high imprudence and egregious folly, can lay my hand on my breast and attest the rectitude of my heart, you will pardon me, Madam, if I do not carry my complaisance so far, as humbly to acquiesce in the name of Villain, merely out of compliment to your opinion; much as I esteem your judgment, and warmly as I regard your worth.

I have already told you, and I again aver it, that, at the period of time alluded to, I was not under the smallest moral tie to Mrs. B——; nor did I, nor could I then know, all the powerful circumstances that omnipotent necessity was busy laying in wait for me. When you call over the scenes that have passed between us, you will survey the conduct of an honest man, struggling successfully with temptations, the most powerful that ever beset humanity, and preserving untainted honour, in situations where the austerest virtue would have forgiven a fall: situations that, I will dare to say, not a single individual of all his kind, even with half his sensibility and passion, could have encountered without ruin; and I leave you to guess, Madam, how such a man is likely to digest an accusation of perfidious treachery.

Was I to blame, Madam, in being the distracted victim of charms which, I affirm it, no man ever approached with impunity? Had I seen the least glimmering of hope that these charms could ever have been mine; or even had not iron necessity—But these are unavailing words.

I would have called on you when I was in town, indeed I could not have resisted it, but that Mr. Ainslie told me that you were determined to avoid your windows while I was in town, lest even a glance of me should occur in the street.

When I shall have regained your good opinion, perhaps I may venture to solicit your friendship; but, be that as it may, the first of her sex I ever knew shall always be the object of my warmest good wishes.

(37.)

TO CLARINDA.

[*Spring of 1791.*]

I HAVE, indeed, been ill, Madam, this whole winter. An incessant headache, depression of spirits, and all the truly miserable consequences of a deranged nervous system, have made dreadful havoc of my health and peace. Add to all this, a line of life, into which I have lately entered, obliges me to ride, upon an average, at least two hundred miles every week. However, thank heaven I am now greatly better in my health.

* * * * *

I cannot, will not, enter into extenuatory circumstances; else I could show you how my precipitate, headlong, unthinking conduct leagued with a conjuncture of unlucky events, to thrust me out of a possibility of keeping the path of rectitude; to curse me, by an irreconcileable war between my duty and my nearest wishes, and to damn me with a choice only of different species of error and misconduct.

I dare not trust myself further with this subject. The following song is one of my latest productions; and I send it you as I would do anything else, because it pleases myself.

[Song enclosed—"My Lovely Naney."]

(38.)

TO CLARINDA.

[*Autumn of 1791.*]

I HAVE received both your last letters, Madam, and ought, and would have answered the first, long ago. But on what subject shall I write you? How can you expect a correspondent should write you, when you declare that you mean to preserve his letters, with a view, sooner or later, to expose them on the pillory of derision, and the rack of criticism? This is gagging me completely, as to speaking the sentiments of my bosom, else, Madam, I could, perhaps, too truly

"Join grief with grief, and echo sighs to thine!"

I have perused your most beautiful, but most pathetic Poem: do not ask me how often, or with what emotions. You know that "I dare to sin, but not to lie!" Your verses wring the confession from my inmost soul, that—I will say it, expose it if you please—that I have, more than once in my life, been the victim of a damning conjuncture of circumstances; and that to me you must be ever

"Dear as the light that visits those sad eyes."

I have just, since I had yours, composed the following stanzas. Let me know your opinion of them.

"Sweet Sensibility, how charming,
Thou, my Friend, eanst truly tell;
But how Distress, with horrors arming,
Thou, alas! hast known too well!

Fairest Flower, behold the lily,
Blooming in the sunny ray;
Let the blast sweep o'er the valley,
See it prostrate on the clay.

Hear the wood-lark charm the forest,
Telling o'er his little joys;
But, alas! a prey the surest
To each pirate of the skies.

Dearly bought the hidden treasure
Finer feelings can bestow:
Cords that vibrate sweetest pleasure
Thrill the deepest notes of wo."

I have one other piece in your taste; but I have just a snatch of time.

(39.) TO CLARINDA.
ENCLOSING "LAMENT OF MARY, QUEEN OF SCOTS."

SUCH, my dearest Clarinda, were the words of the amiable but unfortunate Mary. Misfortune seems to take a peculiar pleasure in darting her arrows against "honest men and bonny lasses." Of this, you are too, too just a proof; but may your future fate be a bright exception to the remark! In the words of Hamlet,

"Adieu, adieu, adieu! Remember me."

SYLVANDER.

Leadhills, Thursday, Noon [11th December, 1791].

(40.) TO CLARINDA.

Dumfries [15th December, 1791].

I HAVE some merit, my ever dearest of women, in attracting and securing the heart of Clarinda. In her I met with the most accomplished of all womankind, the first of all God's works; and yet I, even I, had the good fortune to appear amiable in her sight.

By the by, this is the sixth letter that I have written you since I left you; and if you were an ordinary being, as you are a creature very extraordinary—an instance of what God Almighty in the plenitude of his power, and the fulness of his goodness, can make!—I would never forgive you for not answering my letters.

I have sent in your hair, a part of the parcel you gave me, with a measure, to Mr Bruce the jeweller in Prince's Street, to get a ring done for me. I have likewise sent in the verses On Sensibility altered to

"Sensibility how charming,
Dearest Nancy, thou canst tell," &c.,

to the Editor of the Scots Songs, of which you have three volumes, to set to a most beautiful air; out of compliment to the first of women, my ever-beloved, my ever-sacred Clarinda. I shall probably write you to-morrow. In the meantime, from a man who is literally drunk, accept and forgive!

R. B.

(41.)

TO CLARINDA.

Dumfries, 27th December, 1791.

I HAVE yours, my ever dearest Madam, this moment. I have just ten minutes before the post goes; and these I shall employ in sending you some songs I have just been composing to different tunes, for the Collection of Songs, of which you have three volumes, and of which you shall have the fourth.

The rest of this song is on the wheels.

Adieu. Adieu.

SYLVANDER.

[Songs enclosed—"Ae fond kiss," "Behold the hour," "Anee mair, I hail thee."]

(42.)

TO CLARINDA.

[Autumn of 1792.]

I SUPPOSE, my dear Madam, that by your neglecting to inform me of your arrival in Europe—a circumstance that could not be indifferent to me, as, indeed, no occurrence relating to you can—you meant to leave me to guess and gather that a correspondence I once had the honour and felicity to enjoy, is to be no more. Alas! what heavy-laden sounds are these—"No more!" The wretch who has never tasted pleasure, has never known wo; what drives the soul to madness, is the recollection of joys that are "no more!" But this is not language to the world: they do not understand it. But come, ye few—the children of Feeling and Sentiment!—ye whose trembling bosom-chords ache to unutterable anguish, as recollection gushes on the heart!—ye who are capable of an attachment, keen as the arrow of Death, and strong as the vigour of immortal being—come! and your ears shall drink a tale—But, hush! I must not, can not tell it; agony is in the recollection, and frenzy in the recital!

But, Madam—to leave the paths that lead to madness—I congratulate your friends on your return; and I hope that the precious health, which Miss P. tells me is so much injured, is restored, or restoring. There is a fatality attends Miss Peacock's correspondence and mine. Two of my letters, it seems, she never received; and her last came while I was in Ayrshire, was unfortunately mislaid, and only found about ten days or a fortnight ago, on removing a desk of drawers.

I present you a book: may I hope you will accept of it. I daresay you will have brought your books with you. The fourth volume of the Scots Songs is published; I will presume to send it you. Shall I hear from you? But first hear me. No cold language—no prudential documents: I despise advice, and scorn control. If you are not to write such language, such sentiments as you know I shall wish, shall delight to receive, I conjure you, by wounded pride! by ruined peace! by frantic, disappointed passion! by all the many ills that constitute that sum of human woes, a broken heart!!!—to me be silent for ever.

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(43.)

TO CLARINDA.

[1793.]

BEFORE you ask me why I have not written you, first let me be informed by you, *how I shall write you?* "In friendship," you say; and I have many a time taken up my pen to try an epistle of "friendship" to you; but it will not do: 'tis like Jove grasping a pop-gun, after having wielded his thunder. When I take up the pen, recollection ruins me. Ah! my ever dearest Clarinda! Clarinda! What a host of memory's tenderest offspring crowd on my fancy at that sound! But I must not indulge that subject.—You have forbid it.

I am extremely happy to learn that your precious health is re-established, and that you are once more fit to enjoy that satisfaction in existence, which health alone can give us. My old friend Ainslie has indeed been kind to you. Tell him that I envy him the power of serving you. I had a letter from him a while ago, but it was so dry, so distant, so like a card to one of his clients, that I could scarce bear to read it, and have not yet answered it. He is a good honest fellow, and *can* write a friendly letter, which would do equal honour to his head and his heart, as a whole sheaf of his letters which I have by me will witness; and though Fame does not blow her trumpet at my approach *now*, as she did *then*, when he first honoured me with his friendship, yet I am as proud as ever; and when I am laid in my grave, I wish to be stretched at my full length, that I may occupy every inch of ground I have a right to.

You would laugh were you to see me where I am just now. Would to Heaven you were here to laugh with me, though I am afraid that crying would be our first employment. Here am I set, a solitary hermit, in the solitary room of a solitary inn, with a solitary bottle of wine by me, as grave and as stupid as an owl, but like that owl, still faithful to my old song; in confirmation of which, my dear Mrs Mac, here is your good health. May the hand-waled benisons o' Heaven bless your bonnie face; and the wratch wha skellies at your welfare, may the auld tinkler delit get him to clout his rotten heart! Amen.

You must know, my dearest Madam, that these now many years, wherever I am, in whatever company, when a married lady is called as a toast, I constantly give you; but, as your name has never passed my lips, even to my most intimate friend, I give you by the name of Mrs Mac. This is so well known among my acquaintances, that when any married lady is called for, the toastmaster will say—"O, we need not ask him who it is: here's Mrs. Mac!" I have also, among my convivial friends, set on foot a round of toasts, which I call a round of Arcadian Shepherdesses; that is a round of favourite ladies, under female names celebrated in ancient song; and then you are my Clarinda. So, my lovely Clarinda, I devote this glass of wine to a most ardent wish for your happiness.

In vain would Prudence, with decorous sneer,
Point out a censoring world, and bid me fear:
Above that world on wings of love I rise,
I know its worst, and can that worst despise.

"Wrong'd, injured, shunned, unpitied, unredrest;
The mock'd quotation of the scorner's jest"—
Let Prudence' direst bodements on me fall,
Clarinda, rich reward! o'erpays them all.

I have been rhyming a little of late, but I do not know if they are worth postage.

Tell me what you think of the following monody.

The subject of the foregoing is a woman of fashion in this country, with whom at one period I was well acquainted. By some scandalous conduct to me, and two or three other gentlemen here as well as me, she steered so far to the north of my good opinion, that I have made her the theme of several ill-natured things. The following epigram struck me the other day as I passed her carriage.

[For Monody, Epitaph, Epigram, &c., see Posthumous Works, p. 344, &c.]

[Although we can hardly read the entire correspondence, of which the foregoing letters constitute but one side, without some qualms of apprehension for the moral rectitude of both parties concerned, the final conviction is that there was really no actual guilt between them: yet it was a narrow escape; and as Mrs. Jamieson remarks, applying the expressive words of Scripture to their situation, "they are saved, yet so as by fire." That such a correspondence should terminate without reproaches on both sides, was perhaps impossible; but no permanent unkindness seems to have been the result, nor perhaps any real mischief intended. Clarinda must have been blind indeed, if she did not see how it would all end. Her own sentiments of regard, however, for the gifted man by whom she had been so highly distinguished, seem to have continued undiminished during life, as the following words recorded in her diary, and published by her grandson, prove:

"6th Dec., 1831.—This day I never can forget. Parted with Burns in the year 1791, never more to meet in this world.—Oh, may we meet in Heaven!"

And that Burns's regard for her was compatible, at least for a while, with genuine convictions both of religion and morality on his part, may be fairly enough inferred from such an inscription as the following in his own handwriting, on a copy of such a book as 'Young's Night Thoughts,' presented by himself to her.

To Mrs. M'Ilhose* this Poem, the sentiments of the heirs of immortality, told in the numbers of Paradise, is respectfully presented by

ROBT. BURNS.

* [So spelt.]

The date of this inscription cannot be exactly ascertained. It must have been sometime after the commencement of their acquaintance, however, for the date of the edition is 1788. Below the inscription the following note occurs, in the lady's own hand—

"Mrs. M'Lehose presents this Book to Mr. Kilpatrick Sharp as a small return for all his kindness."

This volume was sold along with the rest of Mr. Kirkpatrick Sharpe's books at Edinburgh in 1852, and is now the property of C. G. Clark, Esq., Dumfriesshire: by whose courtesy, through Dr. Grierson of Thornhill, we have a photograph of the inscription. The above writing in Mrs. M'Lehose's hand, bequeathing the volume to Mr. Sharp, is marked with much trepidation and excitement. The syllables of the gentleman's first name, in fact, are completely transposed. The word stands actually thus—Mr. Calpitrick Sharp; being a strange accumulation of all his names at once, which were Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe.]

To Miss Mary Peacock.

Dec. 6, 1792.

DEAR MADAM,

I HAVE written so often to you and have got no answer, that I had resolved never to lift up a pen to you again; but this eventful day, *the sixth of December*, recalls to my memory

such a scene! Heaven and earth! when I remember a far-distant person!—but no more of this until I learn from you a proper address, and why my letters have lain by you unanswered, as this is the third I have sent you. The opportunities will be all gone now, I fear, of sending over the book I mentioned in my last. Do not write me for a week, as I shall not be at home, but as soon after that as possible.

Ance mair I hail thee, thou gloomy December,
Ance mair I hail thee wi' sorrow and care;
Dire was the parting thou bids me remember,
Parting wi' Nancy, oh, ne'er to meet mair!

Yours,

R. B.

To Miss Williams,

ON READING HER POEM OF THE SLAVE-TRADE.

Ellisland [August], 1789.

MADAM,

Of the many problems in the nature of that wonderful creature, Man, this is one of the most extraordinary—that he shall go on from day to day, from week to week, from month to month, or perhaps from year to year, suffering a hundred times more in an hour from the impotent consciousness of neglecting what he ought to do, than the very doing of it would cost him. I am deeply indebted to you—first, for a most elegant poetic compliment; then for a polite, obliging letter; and, lastly, for your excellent poem on the Slave-Trade; and yet, wretch that I am! though the debts were debts of honour, and the creditor a lady, I have put off and put off even the very acknowledgment of the obligation, until you must indeed be the very angel I take you for if you can forgive me.

Your poem I have read with the highest pleasure. I have a way whenever I read a book—I mean a book in our own trade, Madam, a poetic one—and when it is my own property, that I take a pencil and mark at the ends of verses, or note on margins and odd paper, little criticisms of approbation or disapprobation as I peruse along. I will make no apology for presenting you with a few unconnected thoughts that occurred to me in my repeated perusals of your poem. I want to show you that I have honesty enough to tell you what I take to be truths, even when they are not quite on the side of approbation; and I do it in the firm faith that you have equal greatness of mind to hear them with pleasure.

I know very little of scientific criticism, so all I can pretend to in that intricate art is merely to note, as I read along, what passages strike me as being uncommonly beautiful, and where the expression seems to be perplexed or faulty.

The poem opens finely. There are none of those idle prefatory lines which one may skip over before one comes to the subject. Verses 9th and 10th in particular,

"Where ocean's unseen bound
Leaves a drear world of waters round."

are truly beautiful. The simile of the hurricane is likewise

fine; and, indeed, beautiful as the poem is, almost all the similes rise decidedly above it. From verse 31st to verse 50th is a pretty eulogy on Britain. Verse 36th, "That foul drama deep with wrong," is nobly expressive. Verse 46th, I am afraid, is rather unworthy of the rest; "to dare to feel" is an idea that I do not altogether like. The contrast of valour and mercy, from the 46th verse to the 50th, is admirable.

Either my apprehension is dull, or there is something a little confused in the apostrophe to Mr. Pitt. Verse 55th is the antecedent to verses 57th and 58th, but in verse 58th the connexion seems ungrammatical:—

"Powers . . .

With no gradations mark'd their flight,
But rose at once to glory's height."

Ris'n should be the word instead of rose. Try it in prose. Powers,—their flight marked by no gradations, but [the same powers] risen at once to the height of glory. Likewise, verse 53rd, "For this," is evidently meant to lead on the sense of the verses 59th, 60th, 61st, and 62nd: but let us try how the thread of connexion runs,—

"For this . . .

The deeds of mercy, that embrace
A distant sphere, an alien race,
Shall virtue's lips record and claim
The fairest honours of thy name."

I beg pardon if I misapprehend the matter, but this appears to me the only imperfect passage in the poem. The comparison of the sunbeam is fine.

The compliment to the Duke of Richmond is, I hope, as just as it is certainly elegant. The thought,

"Virtue . . .

Sends from her unsullied source,
The gems of thought their purest force,

is exceedingly beautiful. The idea, from verse 81st to the 85th, that the "blest decree" is like the beams of morning ushering in the glorious day of liberty, ought not to pass unnoticed or unapplauded. From verse 85th to verse 108th, is an animated contrast between the unfeeling selfishness of the oppressor on the one hand, and the misery of the captive on the other. Verse 88th might perhaps be amended thus: "Nor ever *quit* her narrow maze." We are said to *pass* a bound, but we *quit* a maze. Verse 100th is exquisitely beautiful:—

"They, whom wasted blessings tire."

Verse 110th is I doubt a clashing of metaphors; "to load a span" is, I am afraid, an unwarrantable expression. In verse 114th, "Cast the universe in shade," is a fine idea. From the 115th verse to the 142nd is a striking description of the wrongs of the poor African. Verse 120th, "The load of unremitting pain," is a remarkable, strong expression. The address to the advocates for abolishing the slave-trade, from verse 143rd to verse 208th is animated with the true life of genius. The picture of oppression,—

"While she links her impious chain,
And calculates the price of pain;
Weighs agony in sordid scales,
And marks if life or death prevails,"—

is nobly executed.

What a tender idea is in verse 180th! Indeed, that whole description of home may vie with Thomson's description of home, somewhere in the beginning of his *Autumn*. I do not remember to have seen a stronger expression of misery than is contained in these verses:—

“Condemned, severe extreme, to live
When all is fled that life can give.”

The comparison of our distant joys to distant objects is equally original and striking.

The character and manners of the dealer in the infernal traffic is a well done though a horrid picture. I am not sure how far introducing the sailor was right; for though the sailor's common characteristic is generosity, yet, in this case, he is certainly not only an unconcerned witness, but, in some degree, an efficient agent in the business. Verse 224th is a nervous . . . expressive—“The heart convulsive anguish breaks.” The description of the captive wretch when he arrives in the West Indies is carried on with equal spirit. The thought that the oppressor's sorrows on seeing the slave pine, is like the butcher's regret when his destined lamb dies a natural death, is exceedingly fine.

I am got so much into the cant of criticism, that I begin to be afraid lest I have nothing except the cant of it; and instead of elucidating my author, am only benighting myself. For this reason, I will not pretend to go through the whole poem. Some few remaining beautiful lines, however, I cannot pass over. Verse 280th is the strongest description of selfishness I ever saw. The comparison in verses 285th and 286th is new and fine; and the line, “Your arms to penury you lend,” is excellent. In verse 317th, “like” should certainly be “as” or “so;” for instance—

“His sway the hardened bosom leads
To cruelty's remorseless deeds :
As (or, so) the blue lightning when it springs
With fury on its livid wings,
Darts on the goal with rapid force,
Nor heeds that ruin marks its course.”

If you insert the word “like” where I have placed “as,” you must alter “darts” to “darting,” and “heeds” to “heeding,” in order to make it grammar. A tempest is a favourite subject with the poets, but I do not remember anything even in Thomson's *Winter* superior to your verses from the 347th to 351st. Indeed, the last simile, beginning with “Fancy may dress,” &c., and ending with the 350th verse, is, in my opinion, the most beautiful passage in the poem; it would do honour to the greatest names that ever graced our profession.

I will not beg your pardon, Madam, for these strictures, as my conscience tells me, that for once in my life I have acted up to the duties of a Christian, in doing as I would be done by.

I had lately the honour of a letter from Dr. Moore, where he tells me that he has sent me some books: they are not yet come to hand, but I hear they are on the way.

Wishing you all success in your progress in the path of fame; and that you may equally escape the danger of stumbling through incautious speed, or losing ground through loitering neglect, I am, &c.,

R. B.

To Mrs. Rose, of Kilravock.

Edinburgh, February 17th, 1788.

MADAM,

You are much indebted to some indispensable business I have had on my hands, otherwise my gratitude threatened such a return for your obliging favour as would have tired your patience. It but poorly expresses my feelings to say, that I am sensible of your kindness; it may be said of hearts such as yours is, and such, I hope, mine is, much more justly than Addison applies it,—

“Some souls by instinct to each other turn.”

There was something in my reception at Kilravock so different from the cold, obsequious, dancing-school bow of politeness, that it almost got into my head that friendship had occupied her ground without the intermediate march of acquaintance. I wish I could transcribe, or rather transfuse into language, the glow of my heart when I read your letter. My ready fancy, with colours more mellow than life itself, painted the beautifully wild scenery of Kilravock—the venerable grandeur of the castle—the spreading woods—the winding river, gladly leaving his unsightly, heathy source, and lingering with apparent delight as he passes the fairy walk at the bottom of the garden;—your late distressful anxieties—your present enjoyments—your dear little angel, the pride of your hopes;—my aged friend, venerable in worth and years, whose loyalty and other virtues will strongly entitle her to the support of the Almighty Spirit here, and his peculiar favour in a happier state of existence. You cannot imagine, Madam, how much such feelings delight me: they are my dearest proofs of my own immortality. Should I never revisit the north, as probably I never will, nor again see your hospitable mansion, were I, some twenty years hence, to see your little fellow's name making a proper figure in a newspaper paragraph, my heart would bound with pleasure.

I am assisting a friend in a collection of Scottish songs, set to their proper tunes; every air worth preserving is to be included: among others I have given “Morag,” and some few Highland airs which pleased me most, a dress which will be more generally known, though far, far inferior in real merit. As a small mark of my grateful esteem, I beg leave to present you with a copy of the work, so far as it is printed: the *Man of Feeling*, that first of men, has promised to transmit it by the first opportunity.

I beg to be remembered most respectfully to my venerable friend, and to your little Highland chieftain. When you see the “two fair spirits of the hill,” at Kildrummie, tell them that I have done myself the honour of setting myself down as one of their admirers for at least twenty years to come, consequently they must look upon me as an acquaintance for the same period; but, as the Apostle Paul says, “this I ask of grace, not of debt.”

I have the honour to be, Madam, &c.,

R. B.

[Mrs. Rose, a most accomplished amiable woman, was the representative of a very ancient Highland family; with which, by his mother's side, Henry Mackenzie, author of “The Man of Feeling,” was connected. The “dear little angel” referred to was Hugh, who lived to be twentieth laird of Kilravock; “my venerable friend,” Mrs. Rose's mother; and the “two fair spirits of the hill,” Miss Rose and a Miss Brodie.—Partly from *Chambers*.]

(1.) TO Miss Davies.

[Date uncertain.]

MADAM,

I UNDERSTAND my very worthy neighbour, Mr. Riddel, has informed you that I have made you the subject of some verses. There is something so provoking in the idea of being the burden of a ballad, that I do not think Job or Moses, though such patterns of patience and meekness, could have resisted the curiosity to know what that ballad was: so my worthy friend has done me a mischief, which I daresay he never intended; and reduced me to the unfortunate alternative of leaving your curiosity ungratified, or else disgusting you with foolish verses, the unfinished production of a random moment, and never meant to have met your ear. I have heard or read somewhere of a gentleman who had some genius, much eccentricity, and very considerable dexterity with his pencil. In the accidental group of life into which one is thrown, wherever this gentleman met with a character in a more than ordinary degree congenial to his heart, he used to steal a sketch of the face, merely, he said, as a *nota bene*, to point out the agreeable recollection to his memory. What this gentleman's pencil was to him, my muse is to me; and the verses I do myself the honour to send you are a *memento* exactly of the same kind that he indulged in.

It may be more owing to the fastidiousness of my caprice than the delicacy of my taste; but I am so often tired, disgusted, and hurt with the insipidity, affectation, and pride of mankind, that when I meet with a person "after my own heart," I positively feel what an orthodox Protestant would call a species of idolatry, which acts on my fancy like inspiration; and I can no more desist rhyming on the impulse, than an Aeolian harp can refuse its tones to the streaming air. A distich or two would be the consequence, though the object which hit my fancy were gray-bearded age; but where my theme is youth and beauty, a young lady whose personal charms, wit, and sentiment are equally striking and unaffected—by Heavens! though I had lived three score years a married man, and three score years before I was a married man, my imagination would hallow the very idea: and I am truly sorry that the enclosed stanzas have done such poor justice to such a subject.

R. B.

[Stanzas enclosed—"Lovely Davies."]

(2.)

TO MISS DAVIES.

[Date uncertain.]

IT is impossible, Madam, that the generous warmth and angelic purity of your youthful mind, can have any idea of that moral disease under which I unhappily must rank as the chief of sinners; I mean a torpitude of the moral powers, that may be called, a lethargy of conscience. In vain Remorse rears her horrent crest, and rouses all her snakes:

beneath the deadly fixed eye and leaden hand of Indolence, their wildest ire is charmed into the torpor of the bat, slumbering out the rigours of winter in the chink of a ruined wall. Nothing less, Madam, could have made me so long neglect your obliging commands. Indeed I had one apology—the bagatelle was not worth presenting. Besides, so strongly am I interested in Miss Davies's fate and welfare in the serious business of life, amid its chances and changes, that to make her the subject of a silly ballad is downright mockery of these ardent feelings; 'tis like an impudent jest to a dying friend.

Gracious Heaven! why this disparity between our wishes and our powers? Why is the most generous wish to make others blest, impotent and ineffectual—as the idle breeze that crosses the pathless desert! In my walks of life, I have met with a few people to whom how gladly would I have said—"Go, be happy! I know that your hearts have been wounded by the scorn of the proud, whom accident has placed above you—or worse still, in whose hands are, perhaps, placed many of the comforts of your life. But there! ascend that rock, Independence, and look justly down on their littleness of soul. Make the worthless tremble under your indignation, and the foolish sink before your contempt; and largely impart that happiness to others, which, I am certain, will give yourselves so much pleasure to bestow."

Why, dear Madam, must I wake from this delightful reverie, and find it all a dream? Why, amid my generous enthusiasm, must I find myself poor and powerless, incapable of wiping one tear from the eye of Pity, or of adding one comfort to the friend I love!—Out upon the world, say I, that its affairs are administered so ill! They talk of reform;—good Heaven! what a reform would I make among the sons and even the daughters of men!—Down, immediately, should go fools from the high places, where misbegotten chance has perked them up, and through life should they skulk, ever haunted by their native insignificance, as the body marches accompanied by its shadow.—As for a much more formidable class, the knaves, I am at a loss what to do with them: had I a world, there should not be a knave in it.

But the hand that could give, I would liberally fill: and I would pour delight on the heart that could kindly forgive, and generously love.

Still the inequalities of life are, among men, comparatively tolerable—but there is a delicacy, a tenderness, accompanying every view in which we can place lovely Woman, that are grated and shocked at the rude, capricious distinctions of fortune. Woman is the blood-royal of life: let there be slight degrees of precedence among them—but let them be ALL sacred.—Whether this last sentiment be right or wrong, I am not accountable; it is an original component feature of my mind.

R. B.

To Mrs. M'Murdo,

DRUMLANRIG.

Ellisland, 2nd May, 1789.

MADAM,

I HAVE finished the piece which had the happy fortune to be honoured with your approbation; and never did little miss with more sparkling pleasure show her applauded sampler to partial mamma, than I now send my poem to you and Mr. M'Murdo, if he is returned to Drumlanrig. You cannot easily imagine what thin-skinned animals—what sensitive plants poor poets are. How do we shrink into the embittered corner of self-abasement, when neglected or condemned by those to whom we look up! and how do we, in erect importance, add another cubit to our stature on being noticed and applauded by those whom we honour and respect! My late visit to Drumlanrig, has I can tell you, Madam, given me a balloon waft up Parnassus, where on my fancied elevation I regard my poetic self with no small degree of complacency. Surely with all their sins, the rhyming tribe are not ungrateful creatures. I recollect your goodness to your humble guest—I see Mr. M'Murdo adding to the politeness of the gentleman the kindness of a friend, and my heart swells as it would burst, with warm emotions and ardent wishes! It may be it is not gratitude—it may be a mixed sensation. That strange, shifting, doubling animal MAN is so generally, at best, but a negative, often a worthless creature, that we cannot see real goodness and native worth without feeling the bosom glow with sympathetic approbation.

With every sentiment of grateful respect,

I have the honour to be

Madam,

Your obliged and grateful humble servant,

R. B.

To Lady W[inifred] M[axwell] Constable.

(1.)

Ellisland, 16th December, 1789.

MY LADY,

IN vain have I from day to day expected to hear from Mrs. Young, as she promised me at Dalswinton that she would do me the honour to introduce me at Tinwald; and it was impossible, not from your ladyship's accessibility, but from my own feelings, that I could go alone. Lately, indeed, Mr. Maxwell of Carruchan, in his usual goodness, offered to accompany me, when an unlucky indisposition on my part hindered my embracing the opportunity. To court the notice or the tables of the great, except where I sometimes have had a little matter to ask of them, or more often the pleasanter task of witnessing my gratitude to them, is what I never have done, and I trust never shall do. But with your ladyship I have the honour to be connected by one of the strongest and most endearing ties in the whole moral world.

Common sufferers, in a cause where even to be unfortunate is glorious, the cause of heroic loyalty! Though my fathers had not illustrious honours and vast properties to hazard in the contest, though they left their humble cottages only to add so many units more to the unnoticed crowd that followed their leaders, yet what they could they did, and what they had they lost: with unshaken firmness and unconcealed political attachments, they shook hands with ruin for what they esteemed the cause of their king and their country. The language and the enclosed verses are for your ladyship's eye alone. Poets are not very famous for their prudence; but as I can do nothing for a cause which is now nearly no more, I do not wish to hurt myself.

I have the honour to be,

My lady,

Your ladyship's obliged and obedient

Humble Servant,

R. B.

[Verses enclosed—those addressed to Mr. William Tytler.]

(2.) TO LADY W. M. CONSTABLE.

Ellisland, 11th April, 1791.

MY LADY,

NOTHING less than the unlucky accident of having lately broken my right arm, could have prevented me, the moment I received your ladyship's elegant present by Mrs. Miller, from returning you my warmest and most grateful acknowledgments. I assure your ladyship, I shall set it apart—the symbols of religion shall only be more sacred. In the moment of poetic composition, the box shall be my inspiring genius. When I would breathe the comprehensive wish of benevolence for the happiness of others, I shall recollect your ladyship; when I would interest my fancy in the distresses incident to humanity, I shall remember the unfortunate Mary.

R. B.

[The elegant present referred to was the valuable snuff-box, containing on lid the beautiful inlaid miniature of Queen Mary, which, however, when in possession of one of the Poet's sons, was unfortunately irreparably damaged in India.]

To Lady Glencairn.

[Ellisland, December, 1789.]

MY LADY,

THE honour you have done your poor poet, in writing him so very obliging a letter, and the pleasure the enclosed beautiful verses have given him, came very seasonably to his aid, amid the cheerless gloom and sinking despondency of diseased nerves and December weather. As to forgetting the family of Glencairn, Heaven is my witness with what sincerity

I could use those old verses which please me more in their rude simplicity than the most elegant lines I ever saw:—

"If thee, Jerusalem, I forget,
Skill part from my right hand.

My tongue to my mouth's roof let cleave,
If I do thee forget,
Jerusalem, and thee above
My chief joy do not set."

When I am tempted to do anything improper, I dare not, because I look on myself as accountable to your ladyship and family. Now and then, when I have the honor to be called to the tables of the great, if I happen to meet with any mortification from the stately stupidity of self-sufficient squires, or the luxurious insolence of upstart nabobs, I get above the creatures by calling to remembrance that I am patronised by the noble house of Glencairn; and at gala-times, such as New-year's day, a christening, or the Kirn-night, when my punch-bowl is brought from its dusty corner and filled up in honor of the occasion, I begin with *The Countess of Glencairn!* My good woman, with the enthusiasm of a grateful heart, next cries, *My Lord!* and so the toast goes on until I end with *Lady Harriet's little angel!* whose epithalamium I have pledged myself to write.

When I received your ladyship's letter, I was just in the act of transcribing for you some verses I have lately composed; and meant to have sent them my first leisure hour, and acquainted you with my late change of life. I mentioned to my lord my fears concerning my farm. Those fears were indeed too true; it is a bargain would have ruined me but for the lucky circumstance of my having an excise commission.

People may talk as they please of the ignominy of the excise; 50l. a year will support my wife and children, and keep me independent of the world; and I would much rather have it said that my profession borrowed credit from me, than that I borrowed credit from my profession. Another advantage I have in this business is the knowledge it gives me of the various shades of human character, consequently assisting me vastly in my poetic pursuits. I had the most ardent enthusiasm for the muses when nobody knew me but myself, and that ardour is by no means cooled now that my lord Glencairn's goodness has introduced me to all the world. Not that I am in haste for the press. I have no idea of publishing, else I certainly had consulted my noble generous patron; but after acting the part of an honest man, and supporting my family, my whole wishes and views are directed to poetic pursuits. I am aware that though I were to give performances to the world superior to my former works, still if they were of the same kind with those, the comparative reception they would meet with would mortify me. I have turned my thoughts on the drama. I do not mean the stately buskin of the tragic muse.

* * * * *

Does not your ladyship think that an Edinburgh theatre would be more amused with affectation, folly, and whim of true Scottish growth, than manners which by far the greatest part of the audience can only know at second hand?

I have the honor to be

Your ladyship's ever devoted and grateful humble servant,

R. B.

(1.)

To Mrs. Graham,

OF FINTRA.

Ellisland [February], 1791.

MADAM,

WHETHER it is that the story of our Mary, Queen of Scots, has a peculiar effect on the feelings of a poet, or whether I have, in the inclosed ballad, succeeded beyond my usual poetic success, I know not; but it has pleased me beyond any effort of my muse for a good while past; on that account I inclose it particularly to you. It is true, the purity of my motives may be suspected. I am already deeply indebted to Mr. Graham's goodness; and what, *in the usual ways of men*, is of infinitely greater importance, Mr. G. can do me service of the utmost importance in time to come. I was born a poor dog; and however I may occasionally pick a better bone than I used to do, I know I must live and die poor: but I will indulge the flattering faith that my poetry will considerably outlive my poverty; and without any fustian affectation of spirit, I can promise and affirm, that it must be no ordinary craving of the latter shall ever make me do anything injurious to the honest fame of the former. Whatever may be my failings, for failings are a part of human nature, may they ever be those of a generous heart, and an independent mind! It is no fault of mine that I was born to dependence; nor is it Mr. Graham's chiefest praise that he can command influence; but it is his merit to bestow, not only with the kindness of a brother, but with the politeness of a gentleman; and I trust it shall be mine to receive with thankfulness, and remember with undiminished gratitude.

R. B.

(2.)

TO MRS. GRAHAM.

[WITH NEW EDITION OF HIS POEMS.]

IT is probable, Madam, that this page may be read, when the hand that now writes it shall be mouldering in the dust: may it then bear witness that I present you these volumes as a tribute of gratitude, on my part ardent and sincere, as your and Mr. Graham's goodness to me has been generous and noble! May every child of yours, in the hour of need, find such a friend as I shall teach every child of mine, that their father found in you.

R. B.

To Lady E. Cunningham.

MY LADY,

I WOULD, as usual, have availed myself of the privilege your goodness has allowed me, of sending you any thing I compose in my poetical way; but as I had resolved, so soon as the shock of my irreparable loss would allow me, to pay a tribute to my late benefactor, I determined to make that the first piece I should do myself the honor of sending you. Had the wing of my fancy been equal to the ardor of my heart, the inclosed had been much more worthy your perusal: as it is, I beg leave to lay it at your ladyship's feet.

* H

As all the world knows my obligations to the late Earl of Glencairn, I would wish to shew as openly that my heart glows, and shall ever glow, with the most grateful sense and remembrance of his lordship's goodness. The sables I did myself the honor to wear to his lordship's memory, were not the "mockery of woe." Nor shall my gratitude perish with me!—If, among my children, I shall have a son that has a heart, he shall hand it down to his child as a family honor and a family debt, that my dearest existence I owe to the noble house of Glencairn!

I was about to say, my lady, that if you think the poem* may venture to see the light, I would, in some way or other, give it to the world.

R. B.

• ["Lament for James, Earl of Glencairn."]

To Miss Benson.

Dumfries, 21st of March, 1793.

MADAM,

AMONG many things for which I envy those hale, long-lived old fellows before the flood, is this in particular, that when they met with anybody after their own heart, they had a charming long prospect of many, many happy meetings with them in after-life.

Now in this short, stormy, winter day of our fleeting existence, when you now and then, in the Chapter of Accidents, meet an individual whose acquaintance is a real acquisition, there are all the probabilities against you, that you shall never meet with that valued character more. On the other hand, brief as this miserable being is, it is none of the least of the miseries belonging to it, that if there is any miscreant whom you hate, or creature whom you despise, the ill-run of the chances shall be so against you, that in the overtakings, turnings, and jostlings of life, pop, at some unlucky corner, eternally comes the wretch upon you, and will not allow your indignation or contempt a moment's repose. As I am a sturdy believer in the powers of darkness, I take these to be the doings of that old author of mischief, the devil. It is well-known that he has some kind of short-hand way of taking down our thoughts, and I make no doubt that he is perfectly acquainted with my sentiments respecting Miss Benson: how much I admired her abilities and valued her worth, and how very fortunate I thought myself in her acquaintance. For this last reason, my dear Madam, I must entertain no hopes of the very great pleasure of meeting with you again.

Miss Hamilton tells me that she is sending a packet to you, and I beg leave to send you the inclosed sonnet, though, to tell you the real truth, the sonnet is a mere pretence, that I may have the opportunity of declaring with how much respectful esteem I have the honor to be, &c.

R. B.

To Miss Craik.

Dumfries, August, 1793.

MADAM,

SOME rather unlooked-for accidents have prevented my doing myself the honor of a second visit to Arbeigland, as I was so hospitably invited, and so positively meant to have done.—However, I still hope to have that pleasure before the busy months of harvest begin.

I inclose you two of my late pieces, as some kind of return for the pleasure I have received in perusing a certain MS. volume of poems in the possession of Captain Riddel. To repay one with an *old song*, is a proverb, whose force you, Madam, I know, will not allow. What is said of illustrious descent is, I believe, equally true of a talent for poetry: none ever despised it who had pretensions to it. The fates and characters of the rhyming tribe often employ my thoughts when I am disposed to be melancholy. There is not, among all the martyrologies that ever were penned, so rueful a narrative as the lives of the poets. In the comparative view of wretches, the criterion is not what they are doomed to suffer, but how they are formed to bear. Take a being of our kind, give him a stronger imagination and a more delicate sensibility, which between them will ever engender a more ungovernable set of passions than are the usual lot of man; implant in him an irresistible impulse to some idle vagary, such as arranging wild flowers in fantastical nose-gays, tracing the grasshopper to his haunt by his chirping song, watching the frisks of the little minnows in the sunny pool, or hunting after the intrigues of butterflies—in short, send him adrift after some pursuit which shall eternally mislead him from the paths of lucre, and yet curse him with a keener relish than any man living for the pleasures that lucre can purchase; lastly fill up the measure of his woes by bestowing on him a spurning sense of his own dignity, and you have created a wight nearly as miserable as a poet. To you, Madam, I need not recount the fairy pleasures the muse bestows to counterbalance this catalogue of evils. Bewitching poetry is like bewitching woman; she has in all ages been accused of misleading mankind from the counsels of wisdom and the paths of prudence, involving them in difficulties, baiting them with poverty, branding them with infamy, and plunging them in the whirling vortex of ruin; yet, where is the man but must own that all our happiness on earth is not worth the name—that even the holy hermit's solitary prospect of paradisaical bliss is but the glitter of a northern sun rising over a frozen region, compared with the many pleasures, the nameless raptures that we owe to the lovely Queen of the heart of Man!

R. B.

To Miss Fontenelle.

MADAM,

IN such a bad world as ours, those who add to the scanty sum of our pleasures are positively our benefactors. To you, Madam, on our humble Dumfries boards, I have been more indebted for entertainment than ever I was in prouder theatres.

Your charms as a woman would insure applause to the most indifferent actress, and your theatrical talents would insure admiration to the plainest figure. This, Madam, is not the unmeaning or insidious compliment of the frivolous or interested; I pay it from the same honest impulse that the sublime of nature excites my admiration, or her beauties give me delight.

Will the foregoing lines be of any service to you on your approaching benefit night? If they will, I shall be prouder of my muse than ever. They are nearly extempore: I know they have no great merit; but though they should add but little to the entertainment of the evening, they give me the happiness of an opportunity to declare how much I have the honor to be, &c.,

R. B.

[With "Prologue."]

To a Lady.

MADAM,

You were so very good as to promise me to honor my friend with your presence on his benefit night. That night is fixed for Friday first: the play a most interesting one—"The Way to Keep Him." I have the pleasure to know Mr. G. well. His merit as an actor is generally acknowledged. He has genius and worth which would do honor to patronage: he is a poor and modest man; claims which, from their very silence, have the more forcible power on the generous heart. Alas, for pity! that from the indolence of those who have the good things of this life in their gift, too often does brazen-fronted importunity snatch that boon, the rightful due of retiring, humble want! Of all the qualities we assign to the Author and Director of Nature, by far the most enviable is, to be able "to wipe away all tears from all eyes." O what insignificant, sordid wretches are they, however chance may have loaded them with wealth, who go to their graves, to their magnificent *mausoleums*, with hardly the consciousness of having made one poor honest heart happy!

But I crave your pardon, Madam; I came to beg, not to preach.

R. B.

(1)

To Mrs. Riddel.

[In January, 1792, Mrs. Riddel had a letter of introduction from our Author to Mr. William Smellie, Printer, Edinburgh, with a view to the publication of her voyage to Madeira and the Leeward Islands. The following letter, which we extract from Mr. Waller's Catalogue (Fleet Street, London), seems to refer to a presentation copy of that or some other work, and was probably the commencement of their correspondence.]

MADAM,

[1792.]

I RETURN you my most sincere thanks for the honor you have done me in presenting me a copy of your book. Be assured I shall ever keep it sacred.

R. B.

(2)

TO MRS. RIDDEL.

I AM thinking to send my "Address" to some periodical publication, but it has not got your sanction, so pray look over it.

As to the Tuesday's play, let me beg of you, my dear

Madam, to give us "The Wonder, a Woman keeps a Secret;" to which please add "The Spoilt Child"—you will highly oblige me by so doing.

Ah, what an enviable creature you are! There now, this cursed, gloomy, blue-devil day, you are going to a party of choice spirits—

"To play the shapes
Of frolic fancy, and incessant form
Those rapid pictures, that assembled train
Of fleet ideas, never join'd before,
Where lively wit excites to gay surprise;
Or folly-painting humour, grave himself,
Calls laughter forth, deep-shaking every nerve."

But as you rejoice with them that do rejoice, do also remember to weep with them that weep, and pity your melancholy friend.

R. B.

(3.)

TO MRS. RIDDEL.

I WILL wait on you, my ever-valued friend, but whether in the morning I am not sure. Sunday closes a period of our curst revenue business, and may probably keep me employed with my pen until noon. Fine employment for a poet's pen! There is a species of the human genus that I call the *gin-horse class*: what enviable dogs they are! Round, and round, and round they go—Mundell's ox that drives his cotton-mill is their exact prototype—without an idea or wish beyond their circle; fat, sleek, stupid, patient, quiet, and contented; while here I sit, altogether Novemberish, a d-mn'd mélange of fretfulness and melancholy; not enough of the one to rouse me to passion, nor of the other to repose me in torpor; my soul flouncing and fluttering round her tenement, like a wild finch, caught amid the horrors of winter, and newly thrust into a cage. Well, I am persuaded that it was of me the Hebrew sage prophesied, when he foretold—"And behold, on whatsoever this man doth set his heart, it shall not prosper!" If my resentment is awaked, it is sure to be where it dare not squeak; and if— * * * * *

Pray that Wisdom and Bliss be more frequent visitors of

R. B.

(4.)

TO MRS. RIDDEL.

[November, 1793.]

DEAR MADAM,

I MEANT to have called on you yesternight, but as I edged up to your box-door, the first object which greeted my view, was one of those lobster-coated puppies, sitting like another dragon, guarding the Hesperian fruit. On the conditions and capitulations you so obligingly offer, I shall certainly make my weather-beaten rustic phiz a part of your box-furniture on Tuesday; when we may arrange the business of the visit.

Among the profusion of idle compliments, which insidious craft, or unmeaning folly, incessantly offer at your shrine—a shrine, how far exalted above such adoration—permit me, were it but for rarity's sake, to pay you the honest tribute of a warm heart and an independent mind; and to assure you, that I am, thou most amiable and most accomplished of thy sex, with the most respectful esteem, and fervent regard, thine, &c.,

R. B.

(5.)

TO MRS. RIDDEL.

[The following exquisite fragment we extract, with explanatory clauses, from Waller's (Fleet Street, London) Catalogue: in hopes that a copy of the entire original may yet be procured.]

Friday, Noon, 1793.

[Two pages of this admirable and characteristic letter are devoted to strictures upon French gloves—the fair lady to whom it was written had stated to the Poet she could not exist without French gloves.] Had fate put it in my power any way to have added one comfort to your existence, it could not, perhaps, have done anything which would have gratified me more. * * * In order that you may have the higher idea of my merits in this momentous affair, I must tell you that all the haberdashers here are on the alarm as to the necessary article of French gloves. You must know that French gloves are contraband goods, and expressly forbidden by the laws of this wise-governed realm of ours. A satirist would say this is the reason why the ladies are so fond of them; but I, who have not one grain of *Gall* in my composition, shall alledge that it is the patriotism of the dear goddesses of man's idolatry that makes them so fond of dress from the land of Liberty and Equality. [He continues in this vein of humour to inform her how] on the very respectable character of a revenue officer, three of the principal merchants had been subpoenaed before the Court of Exchequer (a crabbed law expression for being ruined in a revenue court). * * * Still I have discovered one haberdasher who, at my particular request, will clothe your fair hands as they ought to be, to keep them from being profaned by the rude gaze of the gloating eye, or—horrid! from perhaps a—by the unhallowed lips of the Satyr Man. * * * [So much for this important matter. He had received a long letter from Mr. Thomson, who presides over the publication of Scotch music, &c.] Would you honour the publication with a song from you? I have just sent him a new song to "The last time I came o'er the moor," but I don't know if I have succeeded. I enclose it for your strictures. Mary was the name I intended my heroine to bear, but I altered it into your ladyship's, as being infinitely more musical. * * * *

R. B.

(6.)

TO MRS. RIDDEL.

MADAM,

I DARE say this is the first epistle you ever received from this nether world. I write you from the regions of Hell, amid the horrors of the damned. The time and manner of my leaving your earth I do not exactly know, as I took my departure in the heat of a fever of intoxication, contracted at your too hospitable mansion; but, on my arrival here, I was fairly tried, and sentenced to endure the purgatorial tortures of this infernal confine for the space of ninety-nine years, eleven months, and twenty-nine days, and all on account of the impropriety of my conduct yesternight under your roof. Here am I, laid on a bed of pitiless furze, with my aching head reclined on a pillow of ever-piercing thorn, while an infernal tormentor, wrinkled, and old, and cruel, his name I think is *Recollection*, with a whip of scorpions, forbids

peace or rest to approach me, and keeps anguish eternally awake. Still, Madam, if I could in any measure be reinstated in the good opinion of the fair circle whom my conduct last night so much injured, I think it would be an alleviation to my torments. For this reason, I trouble you with this letter. To the men of the company I will make no apology.—Your husband, who insisted on my drinking more than I chose, has no right to blame me; and the other gentlemen were partakers of my guilt. But to you, Madam, I have much to apologize. Your good opinion I valued as one of the greatest acquisitions I had made on earth, and I was truly a beast to forfeit it. There was a Miss I—too, a woman of fine sense, gentle and unassuming manners—do make, on my part, a miserable d—mned wretch's best apology to her. A Mrs. G—, a charming woman, did me the honor to be prejudiced in my favor; this makes me hope that I have not outraged her beyond all forgiveness.—To all the other ladies please present my humblest contrition for my conduct, and my petition for their gracious pardon. O all ye powers of decency and decorum! whisper to them that my errors, though great, were involuntary—that an intoxicated man is the vilest of beasts—that it was not in my nature to be brutal to any one—that to be rude to a woman, when in my senses, was impossible with me—but—

Regret! Remorse! Shame! ye three hell-hounds that ever dog my steps and bay at my heels, spare me! spare me!

Forgive the offences, and pity the perdition of, Madam, your humble slave,

R. B.

[This letter, it is to be regretted, in which the writer's own conduct was perhaps a good deal exaggerated, had no effect. Coldness, alienation, and hostility at last succeeded; during which, whilst it continued, many painful and ungenerous things were said.]

(7.)

TO MRS. RIDDEL.

MADAM,

I RETURN your Common-place Book. I have perused it with much pleasure, and would have continued my criticisms, but as it seems the critic has forfeited your esteem, his strictures must lose their value.

If it is true that "offences come only from the heart," before you I am guiltless. To admire, esteem, and prize you as the most accomplished of women, and the first of friends—if these are crimes, I am the most offending thing alive.

In a face where I used to meet the kind complacency of friendly confidence, now to find cold neglect, and contemptuous scorn—is a wrench that my heart can ill bear. It is, however, some kind of miserable good luck, that while *de haut-en-bas* rigour may depress an unoffending wretch to the ground, it has a tendency to rouse a stubborn something in his bosom, which, though it cannot heal the wounds of his soul, is at least an opiate to blunt their poignancy.

With the profoundest respect for your abilities; the most sincere esteem and ardent regard for your gentle heart and amiable manners; and the most fervent wish and prayer for your welfare, peace, and bliss, I have the honor to be, Madam,

Your most devoted humble servant,

R. B.

(8.) TO MRS. RIDDEL.

I HAVE this moment got the song from Syme, and I am sorry to see that he has spoilt it a good deal. It shall be a lesson to me how I lend him any thing again.

I have sent you "Werter," truly happy to have any the smallest opportunity of obliging you.

'Tis true, Madam, I saw you once since I was at Woodley; and that once froze the very life-blood of my heart. Your reception of me was such, that a wretch meeting the eye of his judge, about to pronounce sentence of death on him, could only have envied my feelings and situation. But I hate the theme, and never more shall write or speak on it.

One thing I shall proudly say, that I can pay Mrs. R. a higher tribute of esteem, and appreciate her amiable worth more truly, than any man whom I have seen approach her; nor will I yield the pas to any man living, subscribing myself, with the sincerest truth, her devoted humble servant,

R. B.

(9.) TO MRS. RIDDEL.

Dumfries, 1795.

MR. BURNS's compliments to Mrs. Riddel—is much obliged to her for her polite attention in sending him the book. Owing to Mr. B.'s being at present acting as supervisor of excise, a department that occupies his every hour of the day, he has not that time to spare which is necessary for any belle-lettre pursuit; but, as he will, in a week or two, again return to his wonted leisure, he will then pay that attention to Mrs. R.'s beautiful song, "To thee, loved Nith"—which it so well deserves. When "Anacharsis' Travels" come to hand, which Mrs. Riddel mentioned as her gift to the public library, Mr. B. will thank her for a reading of it previous to her sending it to the library, as it is a book Mr. B. has never seen: he wishes to have a longer perusal of them than the regulations of the library allow.

Friday Eve.

P.S.—Mr. Burns will be much obliged to Mrs. Riddel if she will favour him with a perusal of any of her poetical pieces which he may not have seen.

(10.) TO MRS. RIDDEL.

[From original in possession of Thos. Chas. S. Corry, Esq., M.D., Belfast. Letter seems to refer to miniature of the Poet's eldest son, which is confessedly an admirable likeness of the boy; but no likeness in such a case ever satisfied a parent. See "Kerry Miniatures"—Appendix.]

Saturday, 6 p.m., 1795.

Pâr accident, meeting with Mrs. Scott in the street, and having the miniature in a book in my pocket, I send you it; as I understand that a servant of yours is in town. The painter, in my opinion, has spoilt the likeness. Return me the bagatelle per first opportunity. I am so ill as to be scarce able to hold this miserable pen to this miserable paper.

R. B.

[Here should be inserted an affecting letter on the death of his infant daughter, of which, however, as yet, only the concluding words are known to us:—

(11.) That you may never experience such a loss as mine, sincerely prays

R. B.]

(12.)

TO MRS. RIDDEL.

[Partly from original in Dr. T. C. S. Corry's possession, Belfast.]

Dumfries, 20th January, 1796.

I CANNOT express my gratitude to you for allowing me a longer perusal of "Anacharsis." In fact, I never met with a book that bewitched me so much; and I, as a member of the library, must warmly feel the obligation you have laid us under. Indeed, to me the obligation is stronger than to any other individual of our society; as "Anacharsis" is an indispensable desideratum to a son of the Muses.

The health you wished me in your morning's card is, I think, flown from me for ever. I have not been able to leave my bed to-day till about an hour ago. These wickedly unlucky advertisements I lent (I did wrong) to a friend, and I am ill able to go in quest of him.

The Muses have not quite forsaken me. The following detached stanzas I intend to interweave in some disastrous tale of a shepherd, "Despairing beside a clear stream."

L'amour, toujours l'amour! Volte Subito.

The trout in yonder wimpling burn
That glides, a silver dart, &c.

Have you seen Clarke's Sonatas, the subjects from Scots airs? If not, send for my copy.

R. B.

(13.)

TO MRS. RIDDEL.

[From original in possession of George Manners, Esq., F.S.A., Croydon.]

1796.

I THINK there is little doubt but that your interests, if judiciously directed, may procure, may procure* a tide-waiter's place for your protégé, Shaw; but, alas, that is doing little for him! Fifteen pounds per ann. is the salary; and the perquisites, in some lucky stations, such as Leith, Glasgow, Greenock, may be ten more; but in such a place as this, for instance, they will hardly amount to five. The appointment is not in the Excise, but in the Customs. The way of getting appointed, is just the application of great folks to the Commissioners of the Customs; the almanack will give you their names. The Excise is a superior object, as the salary is fifty per annum. You mention that he has a family: if he has more than three children he cannot be admitted as an Excise officer. To apply there, is the same business as at the Customs. Garthland, if you can commit his sincere zeal in the cause, is, I think, able to do either the one or the other. Find out, among your acquaintances, who are the private friends of the Commissioners of the particular Board at which you wish to apply, and interest them—the more, the better. The Commissioners of both Boards are people quite in the fashionable circles, and must be known to many of your friends. I was going to mention some of your female acquaintance who might give you a lift, but, on recollection, your interest with the Women is, I believe, but a sorry business. So much the better! 'tis God's judgment upon you for making such a despotic use of your sway over the Men. You a Republican! You have an Empire over us; and you know it too; but the Lord's holy name be praised, you have something of the same propensity to get giddy (intoxi-

cated is not a lady's word) with power; and a devilish deal of aptitude to the same blind undistinguishing Favoritism, which make other Despots less dangerous to the welfare and repose of mankind than they otherwise might be. So much for scolding you. I have perused your MSS. with a great deal of pleasure. I have taken the liberty to make a few marks with my pencil, which I trust you will pardon. Farewell!

R. B.

* [This repetition occurs in original, and seems to indicate either the abstraction or the earnestness of the writer's mind at the moment.]

(14.)

TO MRS. RIDDEL.

1796.

I HAVE perused with great pleasure your elegiac verses. In two or three instances I mark inequalities rather than faults. A line that in an ordinary mediocre production might pass, not only without censure, but with applause, in a brilliant composition glares in all its native halting inferiority. The last line of the second stanza I dislike most. If you cannot mend it (I cannot, after beating my brains to pap), I would almost leave out the whole stanza. *A Dieu je vous recommande.*

R. B.

(15.)

TO MRS. RIDDEL.

On Monday, my dear Madam, I shall most certainly do myself the honour of waiting on you, whether the Muses will wait on me is, I fear, dubious. Please accept a new song which I have this moment received from Urbania. It is a trifling present, but—'Give all thou canst.'

R. B.

(16.)

TO MRS. RIDDEL.

Dumfries, 4th June, 1796.

I AM in such miserable health as to be utterly incapable of shewing my loyalty in any way. Racket as I am with rheumatisms, I meet every face with a greeting, like that of Balak to Balaam—"Come, curse me Jacob; and come, defy me Israel!" So say I—Come, curse me that east wind; and come, defy me the north! Would you have me in such circumstances copy you out a love-song?

* * * * *

I may perhaps see you on Saturday, but I will not be at the ball.*—Why should I? "man delights not me, nor woman either!" Can you supply me with the song, "Let us all be unhappy together?"—do if you can, and oblige, *le pauvre miserable*

R. B.

*[Birth-day Assembly.]

(17.)

TO MRS. RIDDEL.

I HAVE often told you, my dear friend, that you had a spice of caprice in your composition, and you have as often disavowed it; even perhaps while your opinions were, at the

moment, irrefragably proving it. Could *any thing* estrange me from a friend such as you?—No! To-morrow I shall have the honor of waiting on you.

Farewell, thou first of friends, and most accomplished of women; even with all thy little caprices!

R. B.

[This seems to be acknowledging Mrs. Riddel's invitation to dine with her at Brow: the last time the Poet saw her—when he inquired if she had any commands for the other world.]

To Miss —.

[Dumfries, May or June, 1794?]

MADAM,

NOTHING short of a kind of absolute necessity could have made me trouble you with this letter. Except my ardent and just esteem for your sense, taste, and worth, every sentiment arising in my breast, as I put pen to paper to you, is painful. The scenes I have past with the friend of my soul, and his amiable connexions! the wrench at my heart to think that he is gone, for ever gone from me, never more to meet in the wanderings of a weary world! and the cutting reflection of all, that I had most unfortunately, though most undeservedly, lost the confidence of that soul of worth, ere it took its flight!—these, Madam, are sensations of no ordinary anguish. However you also may be offended with some *imputed* improprieties of mine, sensibility you know I possess, and sincerity none will deny me.

To oppose those prejudices which have been raised against me, is not the business of this letter. Indeed, it is a warfare I know not how to wage. The powers of positive vice I can in some degree calculate, and against direct malevolence I can be on my guard; but who can estimate the fatuity of giddy caprice, or ward off the unthinking mischief of precipitate folly?

I have a favor to request of you, Madam; and of your sister, Mrs. [Riddel], through your means. You know that, at the wish of my late friend, I made a collection of all my trifles in verse which I had ever written. They are many of them local, some of them puerile and silly, and all of them unfit for the public eye. As I have some little fame at stake—a fame that I trust may live when the hate of those 'who watch for my halting,' and the contumelious sneer of those whom accident has made my superiors, will, with themselves, be gone to the regions of oblivion—I am uneasy now for the fate of those manuscripts. Will Mrs. [Riddel] have the goodness to destroy them, or return them to me? As a pledge of friendship they were bestowed; and that circumstance, indeed, was all their merit. Most unhappily for me, that merit they no longer possess; and I hope that Mrs. [Riddel]'s goodness, which I well know, and ever will revere, will not refuse this favor to a man whom she once held in some degree of estimation. With the sincerest esteem, I have the honor to be, Madam, &c.,

R. B.

[The Mrs. Riddel here referred to was the widow of Captain Riddel, of Friars-Carse.]