

# LIFE OF BURNS

## PART FIRST: MORNING—ON THE SOIL.

**O**N day, the thirtieth of October, 1773, the day before All-Hallow's Eve, Dr. Samuel Johnson, lexicographer, essayist, and poet, having accomplished his celebrated tour of the Hebrides, was introduced by his guide Mr. Boswell, with suitable ceremonious flourish, into the county of Ayr. In the city of Glasgow, the distinguished itinerant had been respectfully waited on by Professors Reid and Anderson of the University there—themselves men of very considerable note—who, however, “did not venture to expose themselves much to the battery of cannon which they knew might play upon them;” also by “the two Messieurs Foulis, the Elzevirs of that city (it might have been said, of Britain), who, instead of listening to the dictates of the sage, had teized him with questions and doubtful disputations”—possibly about their own world-famous editions of the classics, of which the Doctor would be loath to hear. Escaped from which perils, the illustrious travellers “set out for Ayrshire,” by way of Loudon, of Eglintoun, and of Dundonald, as it seems. In this region, at intervals, they paid their dutiful and admiring respects to certain noble and distinguished dowager ladies: one of whom, Countess of Loudon, “in her ninety-fifth year, had all her faculties unimpaired,” which was “a very cheering sight to Dr. Johnson, who had an extraordinary desire for long life;” and the other, Countess of Eglintoun, in her eighty-fifth year, whose “figure was majestick, her manners high-bred, her reading extensive, and her conversation elegant, had been the admiration of the gay circles of life, and the patroness of poets”—of Allan Ramsay, to wit: two admirable specimens, these ladies both, of Scottish female aristocracy. “Dr. Johnson was delighted with his reception here.” On the 31st, which was a “Sunday,” the gentlemen had “reposed in tranquillity” at Treesbanks; where society worthy of the Doctor was hoped for in the company of Sir John Cunninghame of Caprington, “a very distinguished scholar, who wrote Latin with great elegance, and, what is very remarkable, read Homer and Ariosto through, every year.” In this reasonable hope, however, the party was disappointed: Sir John could not appear. They journeyed onwards, therefore, and on the second day thereafter were received in solemn hospitable state by old Judge Auchinleck, at the hereditary seat of the Boswells. It was “before dinner.” “Our first day went off very smoothly,” says James. “My father showed Dr. Johnson his library, which, in curious editions of the Greek and Roman classicks, was not excelled by any private collection in Great Britain.” The Judge, it appears, “had studied at Leyden, and been very intimate with the Gronovii, and other learned men there. He was a sound scholar; and, in particular, had collated manuscripts and different editions of Anacreon and others of the Greek lyric poets, with great care: so that my friend and he had much matter for conversation, without touching on the fatal topicks of difference.” The weather in the meantime, however, had been decidedly unpropitious, cold and rainy; for three days, exceedingly so.

"*Wednesday, 3rd November.* It rained all day, and gave Dr. Johnson an impression of that incommodiousness of climate in the west, of which he has taken notice in his 'Journey.'" Time, therefore, at Auchinleck, notwithstanding the attractions of his Lordship's library and the annotated copies of Anacreon, seems to have passed with doubtful civility on the Doctor's part, and with much endurance manifestly among the good folks there; in suppressed ill-humour, with occasional political bickerings, and in foolish discussions foolishly settled, then or then-about, as to "Whether a people who lived entirely on oatmeal could be other than barbarians?" Amusement out of doors was finally attempted; but the Lugar water, among its muirs and mosses, was still unknown to fame, except for the "ancestral residence of our friends the Boswells," or the retreat it had afforded among its rocks and caves to famished Covenanters and rebellious Whigs—the very topics so fatal to harmony that had been prohibited indoors! James, we may conclude, had an unhappy handful.\*

During these self-same autumnal months, in which the illustrious Doctor had been growling toleration all over Scotland, at the only people whose general education and intelligence at that time qualified them to appreciate his own intellectual greatness, and whose superior good sense and generosity combined to honour and entertain him; a youth, then in his fifteenth year, with great lustrous eyes and manly muscular development, but subject to periodical fits of oppressive melancholy, and just beginning to be transported with the first access of love, was finishing his scanty education by a grand summer session of three weeks at the grammar school of Ayr, within a few miles of said "ancestral residence;" two weeks for revising English—listen well, O shades of Westminster!—and one for the acquisition of French. But "day and night, in school, at all meals, in all walks," says his teacher, "he was with me," reading or revising and listening, as the case might be, "that he might be the better able to instruct his brothers and sisters at home." Whilst the Doctor approaches Ayrshire, with exulting Boswell in his train, this child returns finally from school, to reap almost single-handed his father's petty harvest-fields; and on these express November Halloween days, which "gave Dr. Johnson such an impression of the incommodiousness of the climate," the boy's 'weary flingin-tree' might be heard in the barn at Mount Oliphant, knocking all that could be found of human victual from the modest sheaves. In the household of which he then, and for many a day afterwards, was the prop and glory—eldest son and only servant,—and where no other law but the aggregate authority of filial reverence, fraternal love, dutiful frugality, heroic patience, and Christ-like self-sacrifice was known, milk and oatmeal were almost the sole elements of life. Less animal food was probably used in that family in three or four years together, than the 'Rambler' and his friends might consume at a single sitting—butcher meat being a luxury absolutely foreign to their table during all that period. Yet in some dozen years thereafter—years as long as sorrow and fatigue could make them, and shortened only by love, by reading, or by music—this same lad, then in the zenith of his manhood, with scarcely a letter of introduction, or a single preparatory accent but the sound of his own voice, shall be received in Edinburgh with an ovation of love and wonder beyond anything Dr. Johnson ever saw; and, in less than a century from that date, his name shall be lifted with hosannas of gratitude beyond the clouds by half the civilised world—Dr. Johnson and Mr. Boswell where they are, at their own appropriate level. How poor a judge of human intellect after all, in kindred masses, was this boasted Hercules of letters; and how difficult, with all the sorrows of his own youth, to instruct him in the first principles of respect and charity for his fellow-men.

Of the heads of this household of labourers and lovers, few words shall here suffice. William Burness, Burnes, ultimately Burns (remotely, it is alleged by some, Campbell), was a northern man from the region of Montrose; erroneously, suspected of Jacobite predilections; of non-resistant principles in religion, it was thought by some, more likely; of the purest morality, of the sternest integrity, beyond doubt; a man of strong will and stronger silent sympathies; of parental solicitude and love to a degree that bordered on sorrowful distraction, and seemed to gender a sort of question-

\* Boswell's 'Tour,' under dates.

able awe in the heart of his first-born illustrious child, by whom in writing he was addressed as "Honoured Sir," and in speech most probably also by the latter epithet; a man of reading, of acquirements, of capacity beyond thousands in his sphere; a man of presence also, with decided features, the upper lip especially being indicative of severe resolution: he, and Agnes Brown, of the daughters of that western Ayrshire land, a woman with the loftiest sense of female dignity in her bosom, and in that respect not a whit behind the stateliest countess in the region; a woman who adored this husband, who could listen with pleasure to no speech but his, and who had a fund of traditionary words and music of her own also, to instruct or inspire her children: these, the heads of this household, had been solemnly "married together, 15th December, 1757"—he then in his thirty-seventh, she in her twenty-sixth year. Of Agnes it is further said, that although not tall, and rather slightly made, she was of commanding aspect for her stature, and presented the striking anomaly of rich red hair with deep dark eyes—the hair, in declining years, becoming at last as white as snow—a contrast which, in her youth, might have foreshadowed the combination of strange enough conflicting elements in some of her children. The great dark eyes at least, brimful of eloquence and pity, and the passion that was secretly interwoven like electricity with the shining hair, and that flowed out silently around her from every glistening tip, were destined undoubtedly to be the heritage of her first-born. Robert Burns, in fact, very strongly resembled this mother.

On his way from the north, William's occupation—first in the neighbourhood of Edinburgh, subsequently at Fairlie House\* in the west, and finally still farther to the south and west, by the river Doon there—had been that of a gardener. Dissatisfied apparently with dependent labour, or hoping with affectionate help from Agnes to make it better by and by, he had embarked (in the spring, we may suppose, of this his marriage year) on a leasehold venture of his own, on some six or seven acres of garden ground a little nearer Ayr; on which slight possession, during intervals of husbandry, he erected with his own hands, for himself and his elected bride, in conformity with their modest holding, the Cottage to which thousands from the ends of the earth have since thronged. Waste rubble had he for stones, slime also had he for mortar; rude oaken 'rungs' for rafters, and straw for covering, to the house whose chimney-tops and lintels, without offending God, have at last reached to heaven. A 'but' or kitchen end, to the left, for the unborn prospective progeny made he, with prayerful heart and nervous hand, within this domicile; and a 'ben' for better folks, if better were, to the right beyond; with an 'awmrie' or partition press between, facing the door, and a bedstead—partition also—in the kitchen end, facing the fire: where men now stand with uncovered heads to worship, and women, with unspoken pride, still hope and wonder. Such was this husband-like work of the peasant bridegroom's hand, sanctified in its progress, doubtless, by an occasional approving glance from Agnes, on some unexpected, thieveless errand of her own to the town of Ayr: this resting-place of labour, and humble sanctuary of love; where life from the soil was yet to be patiently waited for, to which sunlight in the meantime and music from the atmosphere, through the open door and stinted casements, might wander in. Between this cottage and the sea lay William's garden ground, and beyond that, the old highway from Ayr to the southern bounds of the county; from which beggars, unquestionably, with their quaint poetical memoranda, and chapmen with their printed sheets of 'excellent new songs,' on their way to Maybole and the surrounding villages, would by and by turn aside to retail and talk. A little to the south stood the ruins of Kirk Alloway, and the since-immortal Roman arch across the Doon; to the north, within a mile or two, the old towers and gable-ends and barns of Ayr, with at least the 'Auld Brig' then visible; and everywhere around lay woods—not deep, but varied and beautiful—shrouding picturesque mansions and separating fruitful fields. Here, for a brief while, William wrought independently; but market-gardening for the town of Ayr, where everybody had some garden of his own, was not likely to be remunerative. The speculation, in fact, would prove a failure. Whereupon Agnes begins a dairy, and William with his

\* Remotely the residence of Lady Wardlaw's immortal Hardyknute, at the battle of Lergs.

spade returns again, upon earnest solicitation, to toil at the behest of others in the neighbourhood—a disappointment vexatious enough, we may well imagine, to the newly married, hopeful pair. But love, courage, and a family atone for all. Resident still at the Cottage, he officiated now as gardener and superintendent for Mr. Ferguson of Doonholm, on whose estate for several years he occupied that responsible position. By the liberality and good offices otherwise of this gentleman, to whom he seems to have been much endeared, he was enabled to enter, in 1766, on the lease of Mount Oliphant, a farm of about seventy acres, and at the Whitsunday term of that year removed his household thither. Mount Oliphant, a few miles to the south-east, was on higher, colder, and thinner soil than where the Cottage lay. No intelligence or industry of his, no self-denial and frugality by Agnes, or toil by his sons, could wring rent and subsistence out of it. It was accordingly resigned. In 1777 he journeyed again more to the eastward, with larger household now, but still in difficulty and with very scanty means—with a mischievous balance, in fact, of debt, by and by to account for. This ‘flitting,’ now at the distance of a century, one can almost yet descry. Best tables, chairs, and presses piled carefully aloft on all available ‘carts or cars’ about the steading; friendly neighbours assisting with horses and gear; Agnes and the ‘weans’ securely nestled among bedding and straw; Robert or his father at the horse’s head, solemn; and Gilbert with ‘Luath’ at his heels contemplative, like the forerunners of the patriarch, in charge of the ‘beiss’ before. Thus marshalled in succession, they take leave of Mount Oliphant in the morning—a blossom or two torn off from the old crabtree in the close (still flourishing there) for a keepsake, as they go; and pitch, after noon, at Lochlea, in the parish of Tarbolton—the crabtree blossom in the meantime faded, or picked to pieces by the children on the way.

Lochlea was a farm twice as large as Mount Oliphant, in a richer and pleasanter neighbourhood, with scenery and associations all superior—for Robert, in some respects at least, we may imagine, immensely so; although the sea-view from Mount Oliphant, with its glittering headlands, green woods, and old towers in the foreground, and cloudy peaks or sow-back ridge of Arran in the distance, with blue Clyde-frith between, could not be surpassed in Ayrshire, and must have been an exhaustless feast of colour and of form for *his* eyes. Close by this new residence, at all events, lay the old mansion of Coilsfield, among its woods and streams, soon to be made immortal by another name; and Auchinleck conspicuous, where Johnson dined; and Ballochmyle and Barskimming accessible, with Peden the prophet’s cave, interesting for ever, among the picturesque rocks of the Ayr; and the sea-view itself enlarged, not much altered or impaired, besides. Otherwise possibly, as a settlement for the family, this place was not much more desirable than the other. Here, certainly, misunderstanding and confusion, ruinous to William, speedily ensued between himself and the landlord. The Cottage meanwhile, with its surrounding garden-acres, had been disposed of to the Corporation of Shoemakers in Ayr, for no great sum; and in a few years more, the crisis, begun at Mount Oliphant, becomes inevitable at Lochlea. To the old neighbourhood, however, of his early toil and love and bride-bringing, does William Burness, just before that crisis can be known, return: not full of years, but of labour and sorrow ended; no longer with the implements of garden-craft or husbandry uplifted triumphant in his hands, but motionless and discharged for ever now, in the spring of his sixty-fourth year; shrouded under modest mortcloth, and borne along in most strange antique fashion,\* returns unconscious by the old orchard, and in sight of the old cottage—Robert and the rest who were born there, or at Mount Oliphant, following silent; with miscellaneous, irregular cortege on horseback, of rude but friendly and very capable men, assembled from the surrounding country-side, and equally inclined for funeral or for fair; to be laid by them, in their unceremonious fashion, on sleep in the gateway of the old churchyard, unnoted then, but with epitaph and commemorative picture-words by and by on his tombstone, that shall survive for ages after him. Agnes, who outlived both husband and son, died and was buried elsewhere, in the eighty-eighth year of her age.)

\* “The coffin was, according to an old fashion, arranged between two bearing horses placed one before another, and thus, followed by relations and neighbours on horseback, it was carried to Alloway Kirkyard.”—*Chambers*.

It was of two such parents, thus briefly signalised—in many respects a lofty and remarkable pair; it was of such a mother above all, then in her twenty-seventh year, and doubtless to her glad relief, that Robert Burns was born, on the 25th of January, 1759: storms from the Atlantic that night prevailing, in which the gable of the new, half-seasoned, clay-built tenement gave way.\* Mother and child, for comfort and safety, were shortly afterwards removed to some neighbour's dwelling. Joy and merriment, we may believe, as well as bustle and anxiety, would abound on the occasion, and many sage auguries by wise women of the district would be made on the future of this boy; the pleasantest of which Agnes, with new-sprung maternal faith and hope, would thankfully treasure in her bosom. This son of hers, expelled by hurricanes from his cradle—why should not his destiny also be great, if not godlike? In September of the following year, Gilbert was born; and the rest, sisters and brothers, at corresponding intervals thereafter, here or at Mount Oliphant, appeared. With prophetic anticipation, it is said, concerning the eldest son, and with exemplary parental solicitude for the highest wellbeing of them all, William, in conjunction with friendly neighbours similarly situated, established the means of education for his family in this remote rural region as long as they remained there, and when they removed to Mount Oliphant, became their instructor himself. In Mr. Murdoch's opinion (almost the only professional teacher, then or afterwards, they ever had, and to whose affectionate services Robert himself was supremely indebted) Gilbert, of the two brothers, was the lad that had mirth and music in him. Robert, on the contrary, was grave, contemplative, and serious in his happiest hours. His countenance itself was grave, his ear remarkably dull, his voice untunable; with no melody of any kind, it appears, as yet perceptible in him—"awkward and ungainly" are his own words on the same subject; but with occasional terrible flashes, that shook his whole boyish frame, of fiercest sympathetic rage against all injustice, real or imaginary, when least expected. This also is on record concerning him in childhood, and more than explains all the gravity and silence of that apparently speechless period. The germ of divine melancholy, in fact, was already discernible here—that mystic drop in the Arabian fisherman's sea-found bottle, that should swell at last to inspiration like the clouds, or overflow in madness like destructive torrents. The child himself one cannot help observing now, incapable as yet of any musical articulation, yet longing to be heard—seated by the wintry window pane alone, or in the orchard at the cottage gable in summer sunshine, or by the sheltering wood-side solitary in storms, bending forward as he sits or walks, oppressed under heavy headaches; musing dumb on the surrounding world with its impenetrable sense, and catching its profoundest music too, a-very far off, from tingling depths within him, which neither Gilbert nor the good Murdoch could ever hope to sound: or when the fit was off, devouring greedily the brief suggestive printed page with meditative smile—How printed words in such and such relations to one another, stirring such passions in his breast, awakening such reveries in his brain, stimulating already to such daring secret rivalries—spontaneously, or by the help of man, came there at all? To what limits by and by his own soul shall expand? With what lustre and harmony it shall fill this world of letters, books, and men?—being as yet, for himself and us, among its strangest problems. Let us look narrowly, reverentially for a moment, believing reader, into all this. (William Burness the stern, taciturn, God-fearing man,) and Agnes Brown the pure-hearted, truthful, loving woman, with the rich red hair and great dark eyes, have begotten a miracle; have become earthly co-editors for the world of a divinely-illuminated offspring. Is it not so? There can be no longer room for any reasonable doubt upon this subject. The finger of God is here. The simple-hearted Murdoch at last, with affectionate admiration, begins to be aware of this. William himself, according to tradition, already sees it, already knows it; and in whispers loud enough for the mother to hear (as if she knew it not!) reiterates in his decisive way, concerning this boy, that miraculous unfoldings shall yet come out of him. It was even so. Instincts like these in humble souls, from the mother and the night-watchers at Bethlehem downwards, are whispers from the

\* Note on "Lad was born in Kyle."

invisible Shrine—infallible, eternal. The Prophet of the People, in short; the People's King, had been born at Alloway.

Not all William's care and anxiety, however, can save this child from sorrow. From boyhood onward, he must toil and suffer. The headaches, for long incurable, yield at last in after life only to palpitations of the heart; and the peasant-stoop, that mark unmistakable of toil, becomes inveterate. But there is golden fire for him in every furrow, incense from God in every breeze, and mysteries of revelation in every blade of corn. To him surely the great Teacher said not in vain, by word or spirit, "Behold the lilies how they grow!" Education comes at intervals for him, at Alloway or at Ayr; from Mr. Murdoch, admirable man, from his father, and from himself: labour and sorrow come everywhere and always. But his constitution is good and his spirit indomitable: he sings inwardly, and sweetens or conquers it all. In 1773, as we have seen, he returns from Ayr to Mount Oliphant for good, in his fifteenth summer, with a fortnight's English in hand, with a week's French; but inured already to the fatigues and triumphs of a full-grown man: returns to be servant, tutor, and student in the humble home. Three or four years afterwards, for a few months, he attempts mathematics after a fashion—the study of mensuration, navigation, or the like—at the parish school of Kirkoswald, with some local celebrity in that department there, residing in the meantime with an uncle of his own, his mother's brother, in the neighbourhood. But a love-beam at noonday glancing on his quadrant—some angel seen walking in a garden, whilst he takes the altitude of the sun; this, with occasional merry-makings on the Carrick shore (where the groundwork of 'Halloween,' of 'Tam o' Shanter' also, was laid) put an end to the anomalous enterprise. This sole opportunity of higher learning, with a season at some dancing-school "to improve his manners"—his father apparently adverse on that point—completes the circle of his accomplishments and of his lore.<sup>1</sup>

It is in this same country side, then, within very definite boundaries; between Turnberry Castle and the town of Ayr, with what of sea-view, sublime and varied, appertains; with such like scant advantages from schools or teachers, but in such fertile discipline of sorrow and love; that the origin of his inspiration, and involuntary awakening of his dormant powers, must be sought for and seen. Profoundly sympathetic inquirers into the higher mystery of his life itself may, with reason perhaps, decline to look much farther for the solution of that enigma. It is already recognisable here—in this coincidence of constitution with the soil; in the blood he inherited, in the atmosphere he inhaled, in the very earth he trod; in everything he heard and saw; with the little leaven of education, and diviner yeast of love, that stimulated and seasoned all. This cake of the Lord's baking, with the glowing heart and turned on the glowing embers of perpetual passion, was itself to stimulate and refresh the land. It is not in every century, doubtless, nor in every cottage, that such a phenomenon of incarnation and the elixir of a nation's life appears; but it is not the less certain, real, or glorious, when it does appear, and is all the more devoutly to be considered in proportion to its rare completeness. Let it once be so recognised, then all offence, all concern about inevitable contradictions, contradictions themselves in the progress of such a miracle, will disappear.

The secret of his life, then, is before us, but not alone: the details of development are before us also. Through these thin, not deep, but quiet woodland shades, which added no doubt their own interpretation to every sound, four distinct and distinguishable voices had already penetrated, and from the earliest dawn of intellectual manhood in the boy, had been echoing in his ear. One of these, and the oldest, was that far-off, mysterious, solemn rock-music of the Prophets, reproduced and circulated with reverent rehearsal on his father's hearth, with which from childhood he must have been familiar and evermore enraptured. The next at school, from some tattered collection possibly, might first be heard, most unlike and unworthy of such association; shallow, sharp, and polished, with stilted stops and methodical periods—from Pope, from Addison, from Swift, from Steele; late-born and conventional the whole of it, yet with strange fascination for him, the conscious youthful aspirant

<sup>1</sup> Gossip, corrected.

for literary distinction in the district. With these, the grander and the graver speech of Milton and of Shakspear was occasionally heard, distinctly, but in fragments and travestied quotations for the time. The third, more like his own, yet how inferior; native, and from the capital city of his native land; rythmical and varied beyond anything heard in Scotland for at least a hundred years, came with highest commendations of the world—a world gross, and grossly pleased—from Allan Ramsay: and superadded to all these at happy intervals, on winter evenings by the ‘ingle-lowe,’ or in sultry sunshine by the moss ‘dykeside,’ the fragmentary but harmonious lilt of soul-stirring melodies and ballad songs, and epitomised national epics of the dim and undistinguishable past. By these, alternately or together, were the woods of Ayrshire penetrated, filled for him. They were recognisable, the best of them, in the common drift of the people’s converse, as well as in the upper atmosphere of aristocratic life, and in occasional ‘lown’ pauses in the ‘sough’ of labour reached his soul.

That the Bible and Spectator, even by snatches or in the shape of an odd volume, should then be found together in a school-going peasant’s hand in the wilds of Ayrshire, may seem strange to some; but with “Homer and Ariosto every year” at Caprington, and with curious “annotated editions of Anacreon and other Greek lyric poets” for amusement at Auchinleck, it is not so much to be wondered at after all. Besides, Ramsay laments pathetically the death both of Addison and Prior, which must have been understood so far by the people; and the ‘Rambler’ himself, as we have seen, in these very years was a visitor in the neighbourhood. No mention of him, it is true, occurs anywhere in our documents of the period, although his visit to St. Andrew’s had been signalised sufficiently, and not with much ceremony, by Ferguson; but Boswell’s own faculty of talk was by no means unknown to Burns, as reference to that gift of his by the poet in his earliest edition implies; and the Countess’s patronage of Ramsay must have been notorious to them all. As for the singing-women and their scholars, or the pedlar and the beggar as they strolled along, with wonders in their knapsacks and stranger wonders in their tongues, these might be heard crooning and liting, or reciting with the credit and authority of oracles, on every cottage floor. Nor were their themes by any means vulgar, monotonous, or scanty. By such reciters the rarest fragments of pathetic poetry, even the most recent at the time, ‘Hermits of the Dale,’ &c., as well as ‘Johnny Faas’ and ‘Gilderoy,’ found their way into the very heart of solitudes, where, in a regular printed form, they could never be seen; and so impregnated the minds of the people with a sense of what was grand or fine.<sup>2</sup> They were, in short, editors, publishers, and living repositories of the richest traditional literature for the people; to whom editors themselves, in due time, were under high corresponding obligations. Of all this legendary, wild, fantastic, and often beautiful lore, the boy Burns, as we know from his own autobiography, was the devoutest auditor; and to all these sources of inspiration, his mother’s own tenderer rehearsals would be the sweetest supplement. Behold then, without surprise, the natural divine issue! By such pervading voices, accompanied at night by the deep monotonous sigh of the ocean, and at morning with the tingling of rivers and the aerial trill of the lark, were both the ears of this child of music incessantly filled—not without a deep discrimination of their various tones, physical and moral, or without conscious instinctive comparisons of his own with them. Not yet fully tried was *this*, but to *be* tried ere long, in concert and in competition with them all. To such competition, in fact, their very echoes were hourly calling him, and with what result, we know. Ecstatic youth-season, surely, with all its headaches and griefs! Incomparable education for him, being such as he was, on the soil of sorrow!

To which of these, in Robert Burns’s own mind, the greatest reverence was due, cannot be doubted. We shall not dare to question that. By which, or by what combination of them all, the actual greatest influence should finally be exerted, was another problem altogether, and one, for the ultimate solution of which the man himself was not responsible. No quarrel with God, in him or us, must be imagined here; but humble acquiescence and submission to the inevitable fiat of the hour.

<sup>2</sup> Gossip, enlarged.

From the Bible, as read by himself or his father in its own simplicity, came such immortal issues as the 'Cottar's Saturday Night.' This influence alone, his own constitution apart, made Robert Burns a Christian man, for ever to be distinguished in this world from such other men as Horace and Catullus. From the same divine source, but travestied by Confessions, by popular superstitions, or even by so grand but partial an embodiment as that of 'Paradise Lost'—all laughable or horrible to him, as religious beliefs—came the most contemptuous and intolerable, but effective satire: invaluable in its place, and never out of place, nor ever to be silenced or displaced, whilst bigotry and falsehood are in the world. From the Queen Anne constellation, such as it was, and so far as visible to him, with all its polished radiance but with ten times more sense and vigour, came the style of his miscellaneous and special correspondence, for noble lords, for fine ladies, for the world at large. His Thomson correspondence, as we shall by and by see, grew gradually out of other and later sources altogether, so far at least as the themes and tenor of it are concerned. Ramsay, after early temporary inspiration, afforded at least certain models of rhyme; and Ferguson, in due time, of more congenial constitution, was absorbed and transmuted as by fire, in his few nobler parts, almost bodily—with certain slight disadvantages to Burns himself, in both cases.\* The last remaining original elements of inspiration for him—the ballad symphonies and recitals of Scottish women, and of wayside 'gangrel bards and bodies,' although never distinctly adopted by his muse, are recognisable in a certain mournful, fitful, far-off cadence of her feet. She walks still in their hearing, and will suffer no indignity towards them. The remotest recognition of Martyrdoms and Covenants peculiar to the soil, and the murmurs of suppressed Rebellion, with silent tread and uplifted hat, as at the passing of a funeral, are perceptible also; whilst the one great depth of national sentiment, stirred by the 'Life of Wallace' as by the shout of an angel, is embodied almost in that single song which has become the covenant-hymn of the people. But in the midst of all these, the irrepressible vitality of the man himself, only yet essaying the prerogative of speech, and the sole supreme inspiration of the earth and air, with their thousandfold combinations of life and music, above the authority of all books and the magic of all traditions, are the undeniable predominating specialities of the case. During this period he belonged almost exclusively to the region and the soil. Of things above or beyond these, like some prospective voyager who looks on printed charts, he had but dim conceptions. Heaven-sent on errands for the world, he was detained in his cradle by Calypso with her alphabet of love. The region and its people, as yet, were his proper universe. Its prayers were his highest religion, its woods his chosen sanctuary, its birds his choristers; its storms his companions, its sunshine his inspiration; its men his models, its patriarchs his saints, its women his enchanters. He drank every morning some draught of intoxication from their eyes. Its lonely caves were his asylum, its cottages his evening 'howf;' its rivers, shores, and headlands the boundaries of his world. Nor was this local life limitation by any means, but preparatory intensification rather, and development of soul. By and by, liberation and opportunities of expansion will come; but still with native right of originality, and inspiration thus originating in the soil, reserved. Years after, when he shall have soared above the empire, he will revert to all this; and must touch his mother earth again in memory, when he wishes to perfect or renew his song.

The entire extent and exact character of his reading during the whole of this momentous epoch—from childhood to his twentieth year—may be ascertained satisfactorily enough, not only from his own account of it as given in partial autobiography, but from the incidental, involuntary traces of it, as his pen itself runs on. The heading of his various pieces, his occasional references to Milton, to Ossian, to Shakspear, and to the Bible, and formal tribute of admiration to Ferguson in his preface, show distinctly in what society his leisure hours were spent; and a habit of quotation, unnecessary and sometimes undignified, which prevailed in his earlier compositions, indicates both the simplicity of his own mind and his exaggerated estimate, perhaps, of certain authorities occasionally dropping in his

\* Editorial Remarks on Language of Burns.



way. But the ease, the strange levity now and then, with which such references or quotations are made, dispels at once from the reader's brain all suspicions about subserviency, undue obligations, or the like. Nothing of all this is to be tolerated with him for a moment. Let the world definitively know that. This was but a great soul, itself as yet untried, glancing furtively from its dim retreat at other souls acknowledged great, for justification or apology in its own most dangerous, fascinating sallies. Has not privilege of this sort already been conceded elsewhere? And shall not we, in Ayrshire here, apostrophise Satan, or jest, if we please, with Sin and Death—but never with God or with God's truth—as fearlessly as did Job or Milton? His reading on the whole, although possibly more extensive than his own account of it implies, must have been limited and fragmentary, but devout and earnest; the reading of a man that would have been a drinker of books if he had them—by the roadside, in the harvest-field, during meals, at the smithy, or in the taproom—as of the brook that runneth by the way: accompanied always with unknown, unsuspected, unutterable broodings and musings, inviolate for ever among the vulgar throng, but mingled ever with the restless surge of unfathomed life within him.

When authorship in reality began, which was very soon after this period, other sources of inspiration were naturally opened by experience of the world—often sad enough, and acquaintance with men: politics, parliamentary proceedings, and the usual contents of the early newspapers being by no means ignored, but with characteristic shrewdness and familiarity commented on. Out of the meanest of all these topics may deathless thoughts arise—deathless, because sympathetic and truthfully original. In the handling of which topics, it is sweet and pleasant still, after so many days have elapsed of progress and discussion, to feel the strong, wild pulse of the unknown youthful oracle throbbing with such musical force among the loud social, political, and religious clamour of the hour; and in his great prophetic eye, half kindled, to read the horoscope of centuries to come. In this view of the matter, no House of Commons that ever assembled in those days, with its floors and benches resounding to the eloquence of gifted statesmen; no General Assembly of the Kirk, or Convocation of Bishops ever convened for the settlement of dogmas and the imposition of forms, was comparable in world-interest with the sanded parlour of Nanse Tannock's 'howf' at Mauchline, when occupied by such a critic of manners, such an interpreter and soothsayer of the times. Out of all these daily and hourly topics, themes and language, and resistless inspiration, of necessity flowed; and it is impossible rightly to understand the effusions of that period, without taking these into account; but the underlying riches of his soul were of older date. The scorn, the passion, the remorse and pity of the moment, were all now being embodied in immortal form for the ears of men; but the store of ideas and the wealth of words accumulated during the lifetime that was past, like the acquisitions of a child in non-age, were indispensable for such an effort. The treasure that was so long hid in the field, or wasted only in prodigal expense upon idle ears, was now to be availed of; and everything shall be heated with the fire, everything shall glow with the mystic hues that were first discovered there. The headaches and the holy calm about the Cottage, the scanty lessons and the precious schoolboy loves, are not to be forgotten; the superstitions of the Carrick wilds will awake again among the woods of Montgomery; the sorrows and the prayers of Mount Oliphant shall enrich and sanctify the whole. O William, now at rest and in silence, rejoice! "Cast thy bread upon the waters freely," said God to thee of old: "thou shalt find it again, with heavenly increase, after many days!"

In the whole of this, the supremest loyalty, integrity, and truth of soul, and harmony of the man's entire being as yet with the purpose of Almighty God, are manifest; and an instructor of the world, to some God's purpose thus, he will surely be. With real things in fictitious forms he may be compelled to deal, and may open his mouth in parables with strange dark sayings on the harp—a thing not to be avoided; but all mere conventionality, ancient or modern, shall be avoided utterly. Traditions—if traditions are in question—traditions that have life and can be realised in life, or

symbols that embody life with its own pith and fragrance, are alone worth attending to, anywhere or at any time, by this man—life itself within him and around, beyond the very cradle and the breast, being the fountain of all authority. It would have been a voluntary self-abasement and worshipping of angels, indeed, for a man like this to talk of Phoebus, and Apollo, and the Muses, and all the rest—as if he were dependent on their aid; which, in point of fact, throughout he almost absolutely eschews. Where he condescends to refer to them at all, it is in a fashion peculiarly his own; which Apollo himself, if he wishes to share in this new miracle of music, must learn to brook. He may be called on occasionally even to trim a furrow and to wind a plough. Nor was there the slightest affectation or insincerity in such condition, or *læsa-majestas* thought of, against the higher attributes of the soul. This claim, like all other claims of his, was a reality. If Apollo declines, or knows nothing of Ayrshire, Robert Burns is self-sufficing, independent, and will vindicate all that requires vindication in himself or his fellow-men. Muses and a Pegasus of his own, with sounding hoof, shall be found for him by every fountain, in every glade, at every cottage door, whether Apollo will or no. In what terms soever, in whatsoever mood, for whatever purpose he may choose to summon them, attend on his behest they must and will. He feels that within him already which justifies a sort of loving arrogance in this—an instinctive apprehension of their whereabouts in his own neighbourhood, that shall put him *en rapport* with them within an hour. In which respect he differs, by the whole width of the world one may say, from his own fellow-countrymen, as well as from all others his predecessors, in the mere art of song; and in this masculine familiarity comes much nearer to the original institution of Parnassus, of Olympus even, than he was himself at all aware. Those idle deities, who encumber every stanza elsewhere with their wearisome presence, he reduces without fear to the level of piquant or agreeable friends. “Queans” and “jaulds” and “glaiket daimies,” shall they be for him; “thowless,” “tapitless,” “outlandish” or “ramfeezled hizzies:” and their winged companion a mere tractable “aver beast.” But when did muses so spoken of listen to the summons of modern mortal man? or Pegasus under such indecorous handling extend himself for propitious flight? Never before, in our times, or perhaps at anytime. Even so. All precedent, all peradventure was against him. But this was a youth who had prevailing power over gods and men. The ardour of his earth-born love subdues those heavenly queans; and Pegasus, unbound by him from the village croft in Mauchline and watered freely at some wayside spring, with an affectionate ‘dirl’ on the flank, driven and exhausted by the spur of love, too happy under such a rider, threatens at last to overleap the sun.

In equipping his soul, thus consciously emerging from the soil, to meet the eye of the world, the two most formidable difficulties he had to encounter were, first, to say distinctly and truthfully what he had to say, without shocking the prejudices of the world; and second, to strip off the mere rags of grossest speech in presence of the world, without the danger of poverty or exposure. There was, indeed, another difficulty: to do justice, namely, to his own genius on such simple, almost despicable themes as came first to hand. In this, the question of accommodation lay between himself and his own self-consciousness; and no better proof of strength and modesty together can be imagined now, than for a soul like his to lavish and restrict its powers on topics intrinsically so poor.\* It was with himself alone, however, and for his own ease or pleasure, he had to determine this: in the other two cases he had to think of, and propitiate the world. Of the genuineness and depth of his religious sentiments, now or at any subsequent period of his life, we can suffer no question whatever to be raised; but no better illustration could be afforded of the instinctive reverence of his mind for divine ideas at this very epoch, when his most daring thoughts were uttered, than the trifling blanks and asterisks in his original edition, where words affecting faith and worship should occur. Such blanks were, in fact, unnecessary—were practically as transparent as the flimsiest veils; but by his own express authority or consent they were employed. The thoughts themselves to be uttered were just and true, but terribly suggestive, and they must be spoken *sotto voce* among men: the possibility of

\* See “Genius and Morality of Robert Burns,” a lecture, where this topic is more fully treated by the Author.

compromising religion itself which he loved and revered, by their ostentatious utterance aloud, must be avoided in the very typography of his text. A man wilfully profane would have been on no such ceremony with religion—Dr. Blair himself, for example, smiled at it: a man without conscience in the matter at all would have run no such risk of offending the world—Dr. Blair never so offended it: it was safe enough, perhaps, for a rustic rhymer like Burns to assume such dangerous responsibility—Dr. Blair, for his own sake, as other reverend Doctors generally do, knew better than to share it. Again, in the other case, as to the choice of words—where so many were expressive and so many gross, and where the worst imaginable example with popular approbation had already been presented by Allan Ramsay; the essential delicacy of his own taste appears indisputable in his renunciation of the indecent terms so common in the vulgar tongue, where humour or the intensity of satire did not absolutely necessitate their use. In Ramsay, such offensive terms are multiplied without any necessity, and thrust upon the reader's bewildered ear as wantonly as in Chaucer.

There is, no doubt, always a difficulty here among writers in a rude vernacular, which only the most gifted, and intrinsically the purest, can surmount; to which the weak and vulgar with base facility succumb. That difficulty lies in the life itself with which all rude vernaculars, of speech or manners, are connected; and which neither painter nor poet can dismiss from his sight or hearing. Chaucer, Ramsay, Hogarth, and Murillo, in this respect, are all alike to be excused. In England, in Scotland, in Spain, in Palestine the same would be. Rural life anywhere, whatever may be said of its innocence, is more nearly allied to mere animal life than any other sort of life men lead in the world. Rural life in Arcadia, or on the confines of Paradise itself, was probably neither purer nor more refined than in Ayrshire. In Ayrshire assuredly, with all the sanctities of the Covenant and discipline of the Session, it was no purer than it used to be in Arcadia or in Paradise; and where the daily language of the field was grounded upon and grew out of the coarsest analogies in nature, it was impossible it should be otherwise. The people themselves were not morally worse, but only plainer-spoken a little than their neighbours. Queen Elizabeth and her ladies, in the days of English Protestant glory, were quite as grossly plain; in consequence of which, the reputation of Shakspear himself has been compromised in the ears of their discreeter descendants. Does not the Woolsack with its velvet cover, at this very hour, represent the whole of it? In the generation immediately preceding Burns, the Pulpit itself, to say nothing of the Bench, in his native land, was characterised by a license in phraseology, by figures, and even by topics that would not be tolerated now. Our taste in this respect has improved; our simplicity, our public honesty, our courage, and our candour have declined: and so it happens, that what was edifying or even beautiful in Ebenezer Erskine once, is rude and unpardonable in Robert Burns now. Erskine commended graces that could never be attained, and his speech has been forgotten; Burns condemned vices that are still hourly practised, and his speech, with all its savage pungency, has acquired the immortality of prophetic scorn. Our speech and our lives have together altered: it is his grand misfortune to remain for ever the same. In Burns himself at that epoch of gross simplicity, growing as he did from the naked soil, and grafted upon it as he was with adhesive force like an immortal shoot, this very sort of life, in all its hot vitality, and the language of this life, in its most graphic unsophisticated forms, were both to be identified and preserved. To separate himself in peace and purity from the fascinations of the one, seems to have been beyond his greatest moral might; and to purge that flaming tongue of his completely from the contaminations of the other, was perhaps equally impossible. By this twofold strong necessity of life and utterance within him came collision at last, of the fatallest sort for himself, with the highest regulations and the sacredest regime of society; which insists, that whatever you may think or know, of it or of its ways, you shall never dare to announce that too suggestively in its hearing. In such circumstances, with such affinities and surroundings, it was Robert Burns's lot to live and speak; and it remains a miracle at once of prophetic faithfulness in the man, and of the most exquisite taste and skill, that he could instruct society as he did on such topics, in words the most unequivocal, imperish-

able, and almost pure. The grossest terms employed by him are there at all simply because they were brimful of truth and humour, and because the world with its hidden blasphemies, with its thin-veiled indecencies and hypocrisies, imperatively required to hear them.

How then in the meantime, anxious readers will begin to inquire, does it fare with himself and with his own moral prospects? Does this young prophet, about to admonish mankind, know wisely how to 'reek' the divine 'rede' himself he is so wondrously preparing for others? Not without shortcomings, it must be allowed, incident to man; but much more wisely notwithstanding, than the world, after so much misrepresentation, will possibly be inclined to believe. Without such temptations as befel him now, the prophet himself could not have spoken with such tenderness; nor without such shortcomings of his own, with so much modesty: without such inevitable occasional contrast of life and words, he would not have been like men at all. His first acquaintance with the outside world—the world immediately beyond his father's door—was in his nineteenth year, among the fishermen and smugglers about Kirkoswald, on the Carriek shore; not the most auspicious school by any means for a youth of constitution like his. At Lochlea, where he became resident at least in his twentieth year, his intercourse with mankind, not much perhaps to his personal advantage, with whatever delight to them, was considerably extended. The flax-dressing enterprise and temporary residence at Irvine, in his twenty-third year, and the associations flowing from that, were apparently injurious to him; unlucky and disastrous, to use words of his own; when ideas of morality, such as hitherto he had regarded "with horror," got insinuated by mischievous companionship into his soul. His frequent visits afterwards on market days to Ayr, and his initiation in the Lodge at Tarbolton, increased his own experience and enlarged the circle of his admiring friends, with whom questionable fellowships also would doubtless arise; but there were elements in his own nature of affinity for all this—"a social and amorous madness," as he calls it, and it could not be resisted.<sup>2</sup> Still his heart was uncontaminated, and his life, as lives then went, conspicuously pure. His studious habits, the gentleness and wisdom of his converse, his filial reverence and brotherly attachments, were themes of admiration everywhere, and till this day are spoken of as the most delightful and refreshing traditions of the land. Above all, the fascination of his tongue, for high and low, was the wonder of the surrounding country, and instances almost incredible are on record of its power, alternately to convulse or melt all hearers.<sup>3</sup> It was in strange rehearsals apparently, in vivid representations ludicrous or pathetic, in descriptive narrations, in imaginative recitals more extravagant than Arabian tales—the work of the moment, that this faculty of speech was for the most part cultivated and triumphantly displayed; but it was by no means restricted to these. It was exercised equally, and with equal ease, in frank, in manly, and in useful discussion with his neighbours and associates;<sup>4</sup> and not unfrequently in acts of domestic devotion, in which he presided now, as head of the household. On such occasions, it is said, prayers like those of no other man, for variety and earnestness, were uttered by his lips—which we can readily believe. On this circumstance, notwithstanding, we lay less weight in support of his moral character than we otherwise might; knowing how much of all this verbal godliness there may be, and often is in the world, with neither religion nor honesty to correspond. With him, we are persuaded, it was otherwise; but the fact is not unquestionable. What must ever be supremely dear, however, for lovers of the man to know, and what is now for the first time announced in hearing of the world, is that this same miraculous gift of his was often secretly employed for the Christ-like purpose of charity—a fact about which there can be no question, and which there seems to be no possibility of perverting. "Whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" "Give ye therefore unto them," said this beaming apostle of humanity to the rich or competent—not with noisy clamour, but with the still small voice of unsuspected love; "Give ye therefore unto them, that they may eat"—and it was given. In scores of instances, if the truth had then been known, the soul of him that

<sup>2</sup> Reminiscences.

<sup>3</sup> Reminiscences.

<sup>4</sup> Reminiscences.

was ready to perish of want, of nakedness and of hunger, would have blessed Robert Burns. Had this man been able "to keep himself unspotted from the world," he had been our foremost saint in the calendar of grace as well as of charity.<sup>5</sup>

But the affectional part of his nature, both amorous and sympathetic, had now attained for himself and others a hazardous supremacy. He had never, like Job of old, "made a covenant with his eyes." Other lessons than that, unhappily, he had learned at Irvine; and God seemed to have filled this lower universe for him, both on its near and on its far-distant horizons, with endless points of transport and disquietude. It was all one moving sphere of resistless feminine attraction for him; as if womankind, on the principle of Juliet's whim about her lover, had been cut out into so many stars, all claiming homage. The susceptibility of his nature in this ultra-passionate respect was a sort of miracle to modest Gilbert, and must have been, whoever witnessed it in force, to most ordinary men. His own account of it is, that his "passions, when once kindled, raged like devils," till soothed or expended in torrents of song;\* and his brother's account is, that if he did not, like Sappho, absolutely sicken and faint away, he came as near to the brink of madness or insensibility as a man still sensible and sane could come.† Love for somebody, wise or unwise, was a perpetual necessity of his soul, and seems to have been an indispensable condition of all other souls like his, from the beginning of the world. That mistakes, and misdemeanours, and shame should follow, as they have always followed in connection with this necessity, and that sorrows and repentance were in store for him hereafter, needs no philosophy of cause and effect to show. That he should have had strength and resolution enough, which thousands have not, to control this tide, and wisdom or grace enough to confine it at last within the sanctuary of home, must have been a marvel to all who knew him. In the meantime, the indiscriminate license of his adoration for every type of female beauty became reprehensible and wrong. Transgression followed. "If I beheld the sun when it shined, or the moon walking in brightness, and my heart hath been secretly enticed, or my mouth hath kissed my hand, this also were an error to be visited by the judges:" and the judges in their own way, and with their own authoritative indiscretion, did visit it, as we all know how. What average morality in the parishes of Mauchline and Tarbolton might then be, we can only conjecture at this date. Probably not high; for transgressors in this sort seem to have been arranged for discipline in batches of sixes and sevens, if not more at a time—a system of indignity, one would imagine, sufficient of itself to demoralise a whole county. Robert Burns was certainly one of several who did public penance on a single day for such transgression, so that he was not in that respect more guilty than his neighbours: but he was more dangerous than seventy times seven of the rustic friends who suffered along with him, and shall one day take terrible vengeance on the church for this outrage in the name of Christ on their common manhood. The torrent of indignation once loosened by this shock became entirely ungovernable. He says less than he thinks on the subject to his friend John Rankin; and for the sake of public decency, contrives to say it in a form as little offensive as enigmatical words can make it. But the thing is said, and shall be said over and over again in other forms, more direct and unequivocal, until the world hears it. The clergy themselves may listen or not, as it most beseems them; but the populations of the country, by and by, shall din it, with remorseless iteration, into their ears. Their 'Holy Fairs,' their Pharisaical oblations, their senseless squabbles, their time-serving policies, their own questionable lives, shall be themes for this man's loudest laughter as long as he lives, and the echo of it shall be heard through succeeding generations, when the memory of their names has perished. At this very period, as we know by many unquestionable proofs, Burns himself was a regular and devout attender on all public ministrations of the Word—religiously attentive as a hearer, and skilled as a mere critic in theology; so that a rupture with the clergy was by no means desirable for him in any point of view.<sup>6</sup> But the truth is, scepticism and scorn together seem now to have been awakened in his mind; and the strange contrast of social life which was awaiting him in

<sup>5</sup> Reminiscences.

\* See Autobiography, and Sketch of his Life by Gilbert Burns.

† Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Reminiscences.

Edinburgh, where acquiescence in sin was perhaps the order of the day, and collision with ecclesiastical authorities was no longer thought of, would contribute to unfold these principles. But even as it now fared with him, practically unknown in Ayrshire, what other effect could communions so administered as the 'Holy Fair;' sessional proceedings so conducted as 'Holy Willie' would be likely to conduct them; rebukes for disorder so administered to batches of delinquents as they were; or composition so made, by a 'guinea fee' to the poor, for violation of the moral dignity of woman, on which the dignity of the moral universe itself is founded—accompanied with all the inquisitorial and indecent scrutiny that was thought indispensable then; what other effect could all this have on such a mind as that of Burns, than the birth of an immortal aversion to the whole ecclesiastical system of the hour? Defiance was the consequence. Assuredly, in that view, the most disastrous deliverance of a church court ever given in Scotland, for the destiny of a great soul, was the decision of the kirk-session that first doomed Robert Burns to public scandal; the most useful in that other view it was, that the satires it provoked have tended more than all other means together to abolish such irrational modes of discipline, and to deliver society at large from such bondage. The blameable victim of passionate impulse he might be, and doubtless was; but it was impossible for such a victim to be smitten rashly, without paralysing the hands for ever that officiously struck the blow.

Nor was Robert Burns himself by any means insensible to the danger of his own position, or unwilling to redeem it, if he could; in connection with which, the strangest miscalculation undoubtedly in his whole spiritual career occurs. It was during this period that his first serious attempt at self-regulation by merely mechanical means was tried; with what effect may be conjectured. He will be tutored into social proprieties by no kirk-session, but he will tutor himself, like a wayward repentant child, in the very same sort of fashion. A common-place book, therefore, must be procured, and a preamble of conventional wisdom written on it, to be succeeded by daily entries of a corresponding kind. But common-place books and journals of good resolutions, to be carefully adhered to from week to week, were not precisely the sort of regulating power that could avail with him. Three times at least, during his brief and passionate lifetime, was this forlorn device resorted to; on the principle, it should appear, of controlling some vital timepiece that must keep pace at once, not only with the sun and with the moon and with the stars, but with the human pulse besides, by touches of diluted electricity. Alas, for the weakness and folly of such an experiment! incredible almost in a man like Burns; yet proof conclusive of the simplicity and sincerity of his nature. "Behold an Israelite indeed," burning with passion like a volcano, yet "in whom was no guile." "Go to, now," says he; "let us be wise!" His greatest wisdom assuredly would have been to discard such machinery altogether, as utterly inadequate, unsuitable, and fallacious. Common-place books occupied with trivial entries, or with none at all; resolutions recorded in solemn phraseology never to be remembered; and remarks taken down with levity, perhaps with indiscretion, were destined only to embarrass and at last to betray the soul. Not here was self-reliance, self-redemption, to be found. Such appliances to regulate a mind like his were absolutely futile, and such means of obtaining a satisfactory self-knowledge, which he professes solemnly in the preamble, were disproportioned entirely to the grandeur of such an end. He mistook himself unfortunately, in the whole of this procedure, for some poetical Poor Richard—mistake, strange enough indeed. The result therefore, as a matter of necessity, was abortive. Means, a thousand times more appropriate, were every hour of such a life at his command, and should have been relied upon alone. To glance in now upon a man like this so strangely at work upon himself, recording his observations with mock gravity, and smiling in his own sleeve at the idleness of his occupation, may be interesting to a few who have curiosity of that kind to gratify, and who would like to know how such a secretary of Parnassus, in fits of contrition or conceit, trifled at his desk; how he groaned and sighed, and cursed or jested, and returned again to folly as before; but no worse treason to his own essential manhood can be supposed. Not Robert Burns is this, the author of the 'Cottar's Saturday Night,' but some would-be contributor to *The Mirror* or *The Lounger*, accumulating

gossip about himself for a third-rate essay of the day. Because such things exist in fragments, fragments of such things shall hereafter be produced in their place, but with this proviso—that they were abstracted indiscreetly from his waistcoat pocket, and paraded in presence of the world, in direct violation of his own express prohibition—before his ghost was aware of it. Fortunate it is, notwithstanding, that there are jottings of repentance complete and beautiful among them, which must be cherished; and exclamations of another sort cut short in shame, which let no man dare to supplement!

The truth is, if such a thing as twofold individuality was ever known in the world, this was the type of a twofold man. The highest Robert Burns, spiritual and irresponsible, brimful of music, of melancholy, of modesty, and of mirth; divinely wise and kind; Christ-like in his sympathies, but profoundly passionate also, incapable almost of self-control in such respects, and utterly incapable of silence; who must speak with vehement musical articulation whatever was suggested to his soul, whatever proceeded from his soul; and who, when he spoke thus, spake with joy and with acceptance to the world—the genuine, the authentic man, was pre-eminent here. Twinborn with this, at the same instant and in the same body, was the superior Ayrshire peasant, conscious of ability, of worth, of strength; conscious of shortcomings also in his daily life; not a little vain of his own achievements, and ambitious of distinction, of prosperity, and repute in the world; affecting a little worldly wisdom also, here and there a little secrecy—of neither of which he was ever very capable; ostentatiously abusing himself, so to speak, in the hearing of his friends; foolishly underrating himself, calling himself, or his diviner higher half, unseemly nicknames; dubbing himself ‘Bard,’ being in reality far above all self-styled bards; unnecessarily betraying the weakness of his own constitution to the world, and with unseasonable apologies compromising the heavenborn co-heir of his own blood and brains. For all which petty misdemeanours must we affectionately quarrel with the man. Two such souls, or equal halves of the same soul, were as manifestly lodged together, alternately exalting or degrading one another, in the person of Robert Burns, as ever two twin tenants were lodged by some supreme authority in a single cell. Which of these two then, for the aberrations of their common life, must be held responsible? Both, or neither. Even as your own higher and lower self, O reader, must answer for it both at the bar of God. “For that which I do I allow not,” saith one, who knew to the uttermost, perhaps, as well as any other, the difficulty of doing always right. But of the two, it is the spiritual inheritor of the common frame we have specially before us here; and it is *his* biography, as we best may, we are now inditing, himself no longer present. The other you may meet with anywhere in Ayrshire still—respectable and serviceable under good or wise government, where he can find it; and to govern him efficiently at all, kirk-sessions, with enlarged perceptions of right and wrong, may still be much required. To him chiefly appertain the common-place books, and by him journals and personal uncalled-for admissions, in name of his divine brother, to the occasional manifest detriment of both, were no doubt suggested. On him therefore must remain the chief responsibility of these; and only where the voice of the spiritual man is clearly discernible in the testimony so adduced, let it be implicitly received or quoted. The first of these documents, dating from 1783, is partly amusing; the second, in the form of an autobiography in a letter to Dr. Moore, in which he speaks rather weakly of himself, and perhaps incorrectly of his father, fortunately for his own reputation, is affectionately but distinctly set to rights by his brother Gilbert; the third seems to have been commenced for study or for occupation’s sake, in the whirl of society at Edinburgh; the fourth, a sort of diary during his north-of-England tour, subordinate; and the fifth, of more importance than the others, in which the two twin voices of the soul, the man and his fellow, speak most distinctly together, cut short by the termination of his life.\*

At this point once for all, and specially in reference to these documents, let us also heartily thank this brother Gilbert—younger a little as we have seen, but companion of his daily toils; reverential of so great a relative, jealous of his reputation, devout and truthful as a brother can be. But for the

\* See Appendix, Journals, &c.

loving counter-testimony of this man, and the firm but respectful cross-examination of Robert's own words, delicately but decidedly done in hearing of the world, Robert's reputation for sobriety and chastity would have suffered by the misinterpretation of his own too reckless letter-writing. Not a soberer lad, nor a more dutiful son, nor a truer brother, nor a purer man, with all his acknowledged love-work, till his twenty-third year, was in the parish of Tarbolton. His morality in fact, at that date, was unimpeachable; and then when the first fall came, there come apologies from Gilbert for it too. Thanks, O Gilbert, God-fearing, generous man, for this needful witness-bearing, faithful as a Covenanter's, at the proper time; and for that gentle vindication also of your father's temper against Robert's inconsiderate haste! All dutiful sons, all loving brothers, for this, shall hereafter honour thee.

The removal of the family to Mossgiel, in the neighbourhood of Mauchline, and under the factorship of Gavin Hamilton, Esq., soon to become one of Burns's most attached friends, took place in 1784. Here Robert and his brother Gilbert became joint tacksmen of the land, and joint providers for the welfare of the household—their mother presiding, their sisters affectionately assisting. In this enterprise, Gilbert possibly had his own share of anxiety, for Robert's literary tastes were now being rapidly developed: but Robert was still the representative man, and responsible head of the establishment; in which relations he was distinguished at once by sobriety, by industry, by modest thrift, and by singular filial and fraternal tenderness. Multitudinous and invariable testimony confirms this. His success as farmer, notwithstanding, from the first was doubtful. The soil was poor, the weather of those years unpropitious, his own attention otherwise incessantly diverted or absorbed. He was ploughman in the field, he was teacher in the cottage, he was man of the world abroad, he was the wonder and delight of society everywhere. It was here, in the midst of this incipient distraction, that the common-place book was so seriously put in requisition, and so many abortive resolutions, with intermingled criticisms and scraps of poetry—indications of his taste, and the only items now worth looking at—were entered; it was here that the evening smithy-lounge was kept in a perpetual ferment of tears and laughter by his tales; it was here that the labours of the hayfield and the 'hairst rig' were interrupted with irrepressible merriment, or neglected perhaps altogether in fits of incomprehensible abstraction; it was here that the seductions of social life and the fascinations of woman-kind became overwhelming; it was here too, most frequently, the sordid rich were beguiled of their hoarded treasures by his tongue, to relieve the necessities of the famishing poor. For worldly success, Mauchline was too near; for intellectual triumph and development, Mauchline, or some other such like local centre, with its newly discovered traits of life—its preachings, its fairs, its ale-houses; its belles, its gentry, its clergy, its 'Jolly Beggars'—was indispensable. The interpreter of life was there; and no common-place book, or worldly-wise solemn resolutions, could shut out its realities.

By this change of residence also, he had been brought a mile or two at least nearer to Barskimming and Ballochmyle and Catrine, with the exquisite intervening reaches of the Ayr—well worth a day's journey still, for artist or poet to see. What was only accessible from Tarbolton as a sight, was now comparatively under his eye; and not unfrequented, as we know. Auchinleck House, only partially screened as yet in its half-grown woods—the work of that sage old senator who received Johnson with such dignity in his new-built mansion, and of whom so many admirable anecdotes are still told; a man of wisdom, of progress, and of worth, greater in reality than any of his descendants<sup>6</sup>—the House, we say, with its valuable library, where so many other treasures besides annotated editions of Anacreon were to be found, although never available to Burns, would be a prominent object then; classic and effective in the middle distance; from which Boswell, with his political pretensions, might occasionally sally forth in Burns's own hearing, to 'gab' at county meetings and harangue the lieges. Ochiltree beyond, with its old-world associations of Knox's marriage with a lady of the Blood, and the Covenant and Claverhouse, and Peden the prophet, with certain sanctified retreats of his among the rocks of the Lugar, deep-flowing there—all uninteresting to Johnson, and possibly not much cared for

<sup>6</sup> Gossip—'Lord Afleck.'



by Burns himself—would bring his eye near to the horizon, grey with frost, or green with ancient undisturbed verdure. It is strange, and not without a subordinate interest of its own, to trace thus the approach of Burns by slow advances along the soil literally, from the fields at Mount Oliphant to the threshold of these Ayrshire magnates, and the footprints themselves of Samuel Johnson—departed now, this very year, 1784, for ever, purged of all his earthly prejudices, and gone up to the repose of immortality. We have no record how any passing reflection on his comparatively recent presence here affected Burns; who could hardly escape the thought of him, and it would certainly quicken his ambition. Ochiltree at that time contained at least one valued friend and correspondent, of some congenial gifts and of considerable accomplishments, in the person of William Simpson, parochial teacher there; one of whose mock effusions, in the name of Burns, passed current for awhile as his, and to whom he himself has addressed one of his most beautiful epistles.<sup>7</sup> Other correspondents also, literary and poetical, including old Lapraik, were acquired about this time, and in this neighbourhood. In short, his opportunities of observation, and the circle of his friendships together, were rapidly extending now; and the first grand efforts of his muse, rehearsed in hearing of the neighbourhood, were attracting attention and propagating a questionable fame. What man out of print, or then living, should dare to speak of the highest earthly respectabilities, and of the most sacred human concerns, as he was now known to be speaking? Delightful it is, in this *chiaro 'scuro* of unpublished life, before the mist has been rolled away by enduring type, to listen to him and Gilbert, as they toil together on the barren croft, speculating modestly about the chance of success for Robert's poems, and the possibility of as good a reception for some of them as for the best of Ramsay's.

His personal appearance and external habits about this period corresponded with his moral life; were striking, and appropriately picturesque. His coat of dark-blue homespun cloth, of "his mither's makin' and his mither's sewin'," with great buttons; his waistcoat of worsted stripes, grey and white, or white and yellow; his breeches of corduroy from the loom; his hose of hodden grey, ribbed and coarse from the needles; his hair, in black flowing ringlets, waving over neck and shoulders; his hat broad-brimmed, low-crowned, roughish make, by no means always on his head—often, when a-field, under his arm; a book in his hands, and when not, his hands themselves clasped behind his back; his head bent forward and his eyes fixed on the ground, he read or went always "like a thinking man"—a meditative attitude which continued with him, as if in natural harmony with his constitution, to the very end; by the banks of the Nith in his early walks on the 'Dock-Green' there, as well as by the Ayr in the heyday of youth, among its green leafy woods or its half-tilled uplands. He ploughed with four horses, he rode booted and spurred, he referred all business to his brother. In stature he was above the middle height, but not tall; in figure, compact and muscular; in complexion, very swarthy—on surface, said by one solitary witness persistently, to have been slightly pock-pitted. Head large, and from its carriage downward, apparently heavy; eyes great, black, lustrous, wonderful. In speech "uncommon pleasand," in smile bewitching, in "crack and in story-tellin', owre a'." The world never before saw such an *ensemble*. So lived he and so walked, from his twentieth year onwards, among unconscious men, among credulous women, who heretofore had encountered no love-maker like this, delighting and alarming the district.\*

Into the bewildering psychological details of the immediately succeeding years, in which love and anger, pity, despair, and weakness seemed to be alternately in possession of his soul, and to drag him helpless, like competing whirlwinds, from shore to shore of life, it is impossible almost with sufficient brevity to glance. The facts involved are so commonly known, they need not be repeated; and the mystery implied is so strange and sad, it cannot be decently investigated. But some attempt at elucidation, on the basis of facts and of his own spiritual constitution, is a thing required. The facts of the case, then, are these: That the man Robert Burns—for her eyes, for her voice, for her feet, or for her figure, it matters not—did honourably and devoutly love the woman, or rather the

<sup>7</sup> Gossip—'Winsome Willie.'

\* See Early Reminiscences throughout.

girl, Jean Armour; that they were secretly and irregularly, but lawfully and truly married; that her circumstances being known, the marriage was repudiated by her parents, and finally, at their instigation, cancelled by herself—a thing which neither she nor they, nor any authority in the world, had a right to do; and that in consequence of this repudiation, Robert Burns, the then veritable husband, was dismissed with contempt, or retired in anger, resolved never more to look upon the woman who had thus outraged and insulted him. These are the facts—unquestionable historical verities in his domestic life; in which the chief points to be observed are the sincerity of his own love on the one hand, with corresponding obligations of marriage duly authenticated, and the outrage he sustained on the other, in the violation of that solemn contract and the deliberate destruction of all evidence regarding it, by the very woman herself he had espoused. Unquestionable love on the one hand there was, unquestionable outrage on the other. At this crisis then, an entirely new phase of social life, of spiritual existence, one may say, was possible for Burns; and the most delicate problem perhaps, that ever occurred in the history of a human heart with which the world is bound to sympathise—and problem which the world has in fact adopted as its own *cause celebre* in the morals of love, was the relation that evolved itself spontaneously from this very situation of injury and despair. In such a case, antagonistic love was supremely natural, antagonistic vows supremely pardonable. A new attachment did, in fact, ensue; not antagonistic, however, but superior; not in spleen or in revenge, but on principles of a still higher and devouter character.

Mary Campbell, by no means graceful or feminine, according to tradition in the place; but sweet, pure, simple, and true hearted—a woman perhaps fairly entitled, among a thousand daughters good and true, to dominate a soul like his, was the object and the occasion of this new devotional fire. In sprightliness and vivacity, in style and in certain accomplishments then much admired, she could hardly compete with Jean. It was on gentleness especially, on high moral excellence generally, her present triumph was founded. In both cases, perhaps—in many others, doubtless—his own eye created half the beauty, his own heart added half the goodness he believed in and adored. But this, surely, was no unpardonable fault in him or them. Such credit is eternally due to all the works of God, and in the poet's own enriching vision lies his nearest resemblance to Deity. The world itself, without such complement of faith and love, would be a shapeless void—an ill-drawn circle, smirched and blotted—what more? But God *saw* that it was good; and from his own eye, through us, communicates to it still both form and light and beauty. That Burns and Mary had seen one another before, is understood; but with no serious attachment, is certain. The scene of their world-famous betrothal, which took place on the fourteenth day of May, 1786—a few months from the date of this rupture with Jean—was in a small woodland hollow beyond the confluence of the Fail and the Ayr, within easy access by shaded walks from the Castle of Montgomery, or of Coilsfield, where Mary's occupation then lay; and at equal distance, along the banks of the Ayr, from another weather-worn crumbling retreat of the persecuted Covenanting seer. In such a spot, and on a Sabbath morning, all thoughts of immoral love, of unlawful vows by man or woman, vanish. The place, the time, the traditions of the soil forbid these. The prophetic soul still lingers among these rocks, the soul of love and song among these thorns. The waters and the woods themselves are still impartial, inviolable witnesses. That heaving mass of snow-white blossom, and bed of hyacinths, like shreds of fringed azure waste from some celestial sempstress' lap shook out among the trees, and broom with empty golden pouch, moneyless, ununsuried—are perennial fountains still of fragrance and of inspiration. Sanctified unquestionably is the ground that Peden trod, and the scenes where Robert Burns exchanged such vows—not with idle, light-hearted, or fantastic protestations across running streams, with broken silver, or the like; but with solemn gift of the Word of God, and the sanctities of thrice fervid supplications. Men cannot help—will never help believing this. Not strange therefore at all, but of the highest moral necessity it is, that in these deep green woods the throb of one heart should still seem to be felt, and the voice of one peasant lad should still seem vocal—floating like a wave

along the banks, and vibrating aloft to the highest casements of the castle. The earth and air are full of it. It is not on parchment certainly, the most enduring titles of feudality are written. Earls and esquires may exchange ownership here; but the indefeasible lordship of the soil belongs to Robert Burns. Of the absolute sincerity and intense devotion of this love, the merest novice in the mystery of human affections may be sure; and of the agony that struck him to the heart, that blanched his swarthy cheek, that drove him headlong, silent, out of doors, when the tidings of her untimely death were first conveyed to him; that sealed his lips ever after on the subject, except to God; and that thrilled for ever among his life-strings like the twang of doom—let no man, for the credit of his own manhood, question more. The will of God himself it was, and not of Robert Burns, that decreed all this; and in connection with this there was neither guilt, nor the shadow of guilt, on his conscience. In this love, indeed, there were the clearest indications that he was already beyond the soil, and that immortal relationships of the highest order were forming within him.<sup>8</sup>

Was his marriage then, in the meantime, annulled? It was not, and could never be; although all evidence of such a contract had been voluntarily destroyed, and both himself and others concerned, the legal functionaries themselves included, believed in its lawful abrogation. Would he then, on this understanding, repudiate the helpless infants about to be born of such unregistered wedlock? or disown them in anger, for their mother's foolish sake? God forbid—being still within hearing of their cries. If any moral instinct in his nature was supreme above all others, pure and uncontaminated to the very close of his life, it was paternal tenderness. Let the children come, whilst he is still in Scotland; neither shame nor anger of his shall ever shut them out. But the misfortune was, that when they did come, insult and cruelty came with them. Threats of prosecution and legal vengeance were the introduction to his notice the folly of their friends provided them; and the man to whose generosity and love both mother and children must ultimately appeal was driven into disgraceful, into perilous hiding—to the verge of expatriation itself, in name of his yet unconscious, unoffending offspring. In such dilemma of shame and pain, one hardly knows what most to wish for the man. What he himself in fact did, was to prosecute the printing of his poems on the one hand; to rush foolishly into convivial excesses on the other, to deaden or to disguise the wound; and to prepare, finally and definitively, to banish himself from the region and from the realm together. He shall no longer offend the world by his unwelcome presence there. Not more blameable surely was a resolution of this kind, than maudlin melancholy, or than endless sentimental sonnetizing on a hopeless theme, or than act of suicide, as with Petrarch, and with Sappho, and with some others? What one can least understand in the whole case is, that from this very period of distraction, and of cruel indignity, letters of his should still be quoted—letters affecting Jean, and obscure unreliable hints affecting Mary—to invalidate his honour, to compromise the very credit of his soul: as if no outraged lover, man or wife, in the climax of vexation, had ever spoken foolishly in confidence, or written bitterly on such topics before. The wonder of all is, that his love and patience survived such a trial; or that he ever condescended to think seriously of Jean Armour again.

It was from the very midst of such sorrowful entanglement, from the lowest depth of such humiliation—when he was literally flying from vindictive writs like a felon, that his voice strong as a clarion, soft and clear as the pipe of love, was first heard in the world. During these very months of molestation and shame, the poems had been arranged and printed. In hidings near Kilmarnock, and with trunk already trussed for shipping on the Clyde; committing once for all his destinies to the custody of type, and with formal legal assignation of all possible profits in favour of the only helpless being in the world who then had any claim upon him—the child that “stared her daddie in the face”—he awaits, with slight trepidation, the eventful issue. In coarse blue wrapper, with capitals and italics abundantly interspersed, as the fashion then was, and with marvellously few oversights considering; the book, with its invoice of immortality, “chiefly in the Scottish dialect,” prefixed, at

<sup>8</sup> Gossip, investigated.

last, in July of the year, 1786, sees the day. The first instalment of his world-work is done. 'Cæsar and Luath,' the 'Holy Fair,' the evicted 'Mouse,' the uprooted 'Daisy,' with their wisdom, truth, and pathos, appeal directly to the hearts of men; 'Halloween' refreshes every fireside; the 'Epistles' transport every distant, wayfaring friend; 'Poor Mailie' is like a heartbreak to every 'bairn;' and the 'Lady's Bonnet' passes, with suppressed titter, into a proverb for the world. Above all, that 'Address to the Deil' abolishes Pandæmonium as with a stroke, and the 'Cotter's Saturday Night' unfolds heaven in the humblest household. Strange, that 'Dr. Hornbook' and 'Holy Willie' should have been omitted from this collection; and that the 'Jolly Beggars,' that incomparable production, then written, should have been utterly forgotten. The book, in fact, wonderful as it was, gave but a glimpse of what the man himself must be; and but a very faint glimpse, after all, of what he should soon be in the estimation of the most incredulous. In some respects, indeed, the book was no measure of the man at all. His faculty of speech was absolutely unrepresented there; and the gift of music that was in him scarcely indicated. A single line or two, one may say, was all the earnest of what the world should yet hear from his lips, in that department alone. In the entire volume only three songs, properly so called, appear; and 'Mary Morrison,' that most exquisite of all expostulatory love-lyrics, although then in manuscript, is not among them—for what reason, but his capricious undervaluing of extreme beauty, his own producing, no one knows. Of the three selected for publication, one at least, the 'Rigs o' Barley,' is of first-class excellence, the other two, good: and by these alone to a discriminating ear, the mystery of melody, hereafter to be revealed to the world, and that constituted him psalmist, was perhaps already divulged; but even upon this evidence, who could yet credit him to such an extent with that secret of the covenant of song, which was to electrify and entrance the nation? As it was, however, no such thing had hitherto been seen among the people. Shakspear, with his magic, had now these many years fallen on sleep; Homer seemed to be from everlasting in schools and colleges, with his train of gods; but Robert Burns, by the decree of heaven, had been born, for the consolation of mankind.

The composition of these wonderful works, so long and so devoutly investigated with increasing admiration of their beauty, was undoubtedly spontaneous, rapid, and irregular. Imperfect models for some of them might lie tossing for awhile occasionally in his brain; but the works themselves were the offspring of the moment—between the plough-shafts, by the roadside, in the chimney corner, at the church itself, or in the smithy. Rough-hewn and fashioned on the spot, slightly polished afterwards, rehearsed by and by to brother, to sweetheart, or to friend—listening all with pride and wonder—they were committed at last to the printed page in perfection, in ineffaceable splendour, with the very aroma of the earth and air clinging to them inseparable. From such slight chinks as the native soil afforded, like the waters of the Doon itself rushing through its rocky eyelets, but strewn on every quiet shallow, and in every pool beyond, with pearly gems, his music flows; from scenes and circumstances the most unpromising—contemptible almost—inspiration, like a phantom evoked by his own constitution, issues, and overtakes him as he flies; on the triviallest miscellaneous foundation of local life, with all its sorrowful surroundings and accessories of mere animal existence, but with the rich underground affinities of sympathy, of religion, of love, this throne of letters has been built; and the fabric, vital in every line, musical and transparent in its minutest fragment, flung together by instinct of the moment, gradually but swiftly rises, tapering and quivering refulgent among the clouds. Mankind, womankind—not strange to think—were captivated, were smitten. A marvel in their own neighbourhood had appeared: a comet, with benignant haze of love and humour, was skimming there almost within reach over the tree tops, and flushing with skyborn radiance the wayside cottage floor. This was a phenomenon indeed, that must soon become an era in the world. With mingled pride and confusion, Jean Armour, let us hope, shall have listened now to the immortal 'Epistle to Davie,' where the very tenor of the man's voice is interrupted to emphasize a prayer for her. Will she then, with twins and with repentance, and with womanly wiles,

venture to fling herself a second time in his way? She may, and will—offending many. Her fate is before her; and she knows probably herself, since Mary's death, better than any friend can tell her, that she will conquer thus, and hold this king of men, after all. But the risk, if she cannot, is her own, and of her own deliberate inviting: with which, at this date, let the world be satisfied.

In the meantime, however, whilst she ruminates over such strange profit and loss—to herself, for the present, absolute loss of happiness and credit, her lover's, her husband's book is selling; husband incomprehensibly divorced for too much love!—is borrowed, and read, and re-read, far beyond the limits of his native shire. In the packman's bundle, in the ploughman's pouch, in the scholar's hand, in the gentleman's valise, in the lady's reticule—it circulates, everywhere, east and west. Letters of congratulation, of thanks, from small and great, are wafted home; introductions to the aristocracy of literature and rank begin; reviews and commendations by the highest literary authorities are heard and seen. A new edition of the poems, therefore, must speedily be thought of; and several fresh effusions, with some that have been forgotten, to enrich the volume, are already in store. But this cannot be restricted to Mauchline or to Kilmarnock (where the printer's heart strangely fails him), or to any local centre. The soil, with all its impediments of poverty and shame, has been conquered now; with its rich lodes of life and joy has been secretly rifled, and must be quietly surmounted soon. Edinburgh and the heavens henceforth, not without danger, are to be sought. So merges the morning suddenly, with auspicious auguries and portentous clouds commingled, at once into the highest day.

Thus then, within few weeks, fares the illustrious peasant out of obscurity, heaven-drawn, earth-driven, life-inspired, citywards; the seductive 'jauds'—the enamoured Nine—triumphantly hovering around him, and Pegasus, with wings discreetly folded, obedient now to hand after many a hasty sweep, affectionately trotting by his side, or gambolling in the air before him. So, to the mind's eye of his delighted fellow-countrymen, fares he, to be received on his progress throughout, over hill and dale, with ovations of gratitude and love. Had not he rescued them from grief? from the bondage of unbelief and falsehood? and thrilled every downcast wearied soul among them with joy? Alas! in that immortal constitution of his, ethereal as it seemed, a secret alloy of perishable earth was found; a secret wound had already been inflicted, which shall by and by extend to an open scar, and perpetual chasm between himself and them; which shall grow into a heart-sickness—an invisible corroding cross, impossible and ruinous to bear. This man, hale, hearty, jocund, triumphant as he looks, with melody streaming from his lips, and resounding from his horse's hoofs along the very highway, has been wrestling all alone, in the pride and wantonness of his early manhood, with the God that made him. For supremacy in the name of mankind has he been wrestling, and has prevailed, at the expense of that dread secret touch, as yet but half suspected by himself, but certainly inflicted; and which no mortal wrestler in this world can escape, who comes into personal conflict with the Deity. "The sun was risen upon Jacob as he passed over Peniel, and he halted (unseen) upon his thigh, where the angel of the Lord had touched him. Wherefore the Jews eat not, until this day, of the sinew that shrank." For us, it was fortunately so; for a singer like this, with a constitution impervious to assault, and purity beyond defilement by the earth on which he slept and trod, would have been terrible, if not impossible, to look upon. Henceforth we can receive him with sympathy and love, knowing him, after all his triumphs, to be flesh and blood like ourselves.

