

LITERARY CORRESPONDENCE.

BIOGRAPHICAL REMARKS.

BURNS AS PROFESSIONAL LETTER-WRITER.

OF Annibal Caro, incontestibly one of the most accomplished letter-writers in Europe, we shall have occasion hereafter to speak more fully: in the meantime, taking even him into account, we must observe that scarcely any letter-writer, whose unrevised indiscriminate correspondence pertains to us, has manifested such an extraordinary power of adapting himself in style and language simultaneously to such a variety of characters, and of attaining at the same time so perfectly the object of correspondence with all, as Robert Burns. To the plainest and the most fastidious; to men, to women, to children almost in capacity, he is precisely what he should be; and whether any of his innumerable epistles failed for the moment of producing the desired effect, they were all, or nearly all, that could be imagined or written most appropriate in the circumstances. That he had the heartiest ambition to excel in this difficult department of literary workmanship, is obvious; and would be obvious from a thousand marks in his epistles themselves, although we had no direct avowal of the fact under his own hand. It was his earliest study, and his most fascinating pursuit, in which he attained at last an ease and perfection rarely equalled by the most accomplished, and never excelled.

On his letter-writing to women we have already had an opportunity of commenting, and have also had an opportunity of judging of its variety, of its beauty, of its singular fitness for the correspon-

dent's claims in rank, in taste, or disposition, in every individual case. Of his Literary, or what may be called his Professional Correspondence, we have now to speak, in which the same characteristics of artistic discrimination are apparent, but with greater latitude and license, as the case imports. His style in these literary communications is, distinctly, of two sorts. We have traces indeed of a third, instinctively adopted in certain peculiar cases, which does honour to his heart as well as to his head; although these specimens are too inconsiderable, perhaps, to merit a division by themselves. The two grand departments of his literary correspondence are those which include (1) the formal studied communications to men who were not only friends and patrons of his own, but acknowledged authorities themselves in the literary, or in the fashionable, world: and (2) the no less studied but much freer communications in which he himself was either the literary patron, or highest imaginable literary authority, for the time. The third sort, of which we have only a few examples (in connection at least with literary subjects), includes those special communications in which he addresses, with the respect and deference due to their position or character, the ministers of religion; or with the mingled authority and consideration suggested by circumstances, those who might apply to him for assistance or advice. To correspondents in each and all of these various

classes, and to every man in his degree, are these literary communications of his adapted—with a freedom, a minuteness, and a propriety of diction that is truly astonishing.

The rudiments of his more formal style, as being that to which a young man almost invariably first addicts himself, and which is indeed most suitable always in certain cases, are to be found in those early studied fragments of which he has preserved us a selection from note books, &c., in his epistle to Captain Riddel. This style was suggested by his boyish admiration of Steele and Addison and other courtly letter-writers of that age, specimens of whose works were made slightly familiar to him at school; and it was cultivated with secret assiduous devotion, in ambitious rivalry of their finest models. Disraeli the elder, in his essay on the Literary Character, laments that the sketch of himself thus begun by Burns, in that epistle of his to Captain Riddel, was never completed; and satisfies himself by observing that "It was natural for such a creature of sensation and passion to project such a regular task, but quite impossible to get through it." Considerable additional portions of the documents from which that epistle was compiled, have been discovered and published, since Disraeli wrote; but they do not tend to throw much more light on the subject. The fact seems to be, that most of the entries are studiously sententious and reflective, after the fashion of a regular methodistical diary, and do not afford half so expressive an outline of the man's existence and character as his unpremeditated effusions to his fellow-men do. This studied style was not his happiest nor his truest; although he carried it to a point of perfection rarely attained even by its professed representatives. The style itself, which was formal at first, but by the infusion of higher elements became at last courtly in the highest sense, in tone and terms, continued with him throughout, but with an immense difference in ease or adaptation, as compared with his own original efforts, and even with the finest specimens of his admired original models. The letters in which this style is most conspicuous, although it gradually melts away towards the close, are those addressed to such noble patrons as Eglinton, or Glencairn, and partially to Buchan; or to literary magnates for the time, such as Dugald Stewart, Blair, and Moore. The letters to Moore,

indeed, of this type, are not only the most considerable, but the finest specimens of our Author in this kind extant. Of the celebrated autobiography addressed to that gentleman, after long consideration and much misgiving on the writer's part, as we learn from the Poet's own letter on the subject to Mrs. Dunlop, we cannot, after the most careful study, speak in the same very highest terms of critical eulogy in which Professor Wilson mentions it; for there are passages in it undoubtedly a little forced, and not a little stilted, in which style still contends with nature, and even with truth, to the disadvantage of both. But to be the first outline of his own life written by such a man in his then circumstances, and to such an authority at the moment, it is unquestionably both a wonderful and an admirable performance. On the other hand, his succeeding letters to Dr. Moore, all in the same style, are masterpieces of the sort; and the letter immediately succeeding, in which reference to Mr. Graham of Fintry occurs, is as near perfection in its way (and that a most difficult way) as any document written by a human pen. To criticise the various peculiar literary and artistic excellences of these letters, and to point out how the courtly and the familiar and the practical blend, and how the whole is uniquely fine, is unnecessary. The reader who cannot perceive and relish these points is beyond instruction: he does not know what a letter means, and never wrote one.

Of the same formal and deferential style, mixed with a tone of genuine respect and even reverence, is his correspondence with the clergy, or with persons in their position, where his faith in their own piety or respectability inspired such sentiments. With them, in such cases, he never jests, nor approaches them otherwise than as a gentlemanly correspondent should. His prejudices against the profession, too well founded in general at the time, neither blinded him to the highest claims of individuals, nor affected in the least degree the becoming and truly religious tenor of his correspondence with good or pious men.

That other style, however, which is by far the most frequent in his correspondence, and which is directly opposed to the formal or courtly, and may be described in a word as the natural or familiar, is characterised by the most apparently unstudied ease, the most unconditional freedom, the most

extravagant abandon, and occasional license. It was in this sort of correspondence, confined entirely to persons of his own sex, that what may be called his natural want of reserve or reverence showed itself—more strongly even than in such extraordinary poetical productions as “Holy Willie’s Prayer.” Characteristic specimens of this style occur most frequently, perhaps, in his general correspondence; although in his literary correspondence also, more especially in his letters to Thomson and to Hill, strong enough illustrations of it, as the reader will soon discover, are to be found. His literary correspondence, however, even of this sort, is by no means to be mistaken for mere random or unlicensed letter-writing. It has indeed a character of its own, in freedom and in recklessness, appropriate enough to the various subjects as well as to the correspondents themselves, of which, or to whom he wrote; and might have been insipid or unnatural otherwise—which nothing from him could ever be. But the amazing readiness and extent of illustration, the variety of knowledge, the keen critical discernment, the inexhaustible humour, and inimitable charm of diction on the dullest theme, by which dross and ditch-water themselves seem to be illuminated, give a far higher tone to this very correspondence, than any mere literary abandon or the most sparkling profligacy of idea could ever communicate. What may be lost or hidden of this kind we know not, and will never inquire; but of what remains we can form no other honest judgment, than that it is the workmanship of one of the most gifted, accomplished, powerful, and versatile letter-writers that ever lived.

The date of this style in perfection was not till towards the concluding epoch of his life, when his powers were fully matured, and the fear of society or the restraints of competition had vanished. We have first the young man’s solemn prose efforts, forced and formal enough, who was conscious of a great and glowing nature within him, but conscious of what seemed for the moment to be a greater, or at least a grander, model beyond him: we have then the courtly style to which these formal efforts naturally conducted, in which they are for a while visible, but in which they are ultimately lost or mellowed—as the green, hard, polished fruit is in the richness and roundness of maturity, and in which the heat and splendour of the inner man are

now dominant: and finally, we have the unrestrained, unmeasured effusions of that nature kindled and sometimes inflamed to the uttermost, on topics that might tempt to such freedom of display, or to correspondents alone who relished or provoked it; which was by no means always unblameable, but always brilliant and characteristic in a high degree. In the current of this correspondence, all ideas of restraint seem to have been abandoned, and all fear of competition out of the question. He had nobody’s taste to consult but that of correspondents whom it would be difficult to displease; to whom in all literary respects he was absolutely superior, and on whose part any attempt at rivalry with him, even in license, would have been ridiculous. His correspondence in these latter years, therefore, might thus easily in many cases assume a questionable form; but it is to be remarked also, that wherever his own opinion in any mere critical discussion, or his own predilection on any favourite topic, or even his own feelings and interests as an author were concerned, in opposition to others—his modesty, his forbearance, and his self-denial together, are an example to mankind. So much, without fear of contradiction, we thus unreservedly affirm.

As a mere psychological study, this progressive change of style, and increase of license with increase of strength, is a most instructive theme. Topics, characters, opportunities, and years crowd in upon the man; faculties and freedom extend together; formulas of speech, once considered most elegant or appropriate, are gradually discarded or dropt, even in the presence of the great, as stilted, or shallow, or insincere; strength, fire, headlong eloquence, with the most difficult yet perfect involutions of speech, succeed; daring parallels, and yet more daring quotations, are often introduced with a levity that startles the most indifferent, and may possibly offend the devout: the man, in fact, seems to be revolutionised: yet, throughout the whole, the sense of beauty is never once obscured, nor the principles of benevolence, of tenderness, or of truth compromised in a hair’s-breadth. Not even, when he visibly staggers on the very brink of mischief or distraction, does a single profane syllable escape his lips in the ear of woman; nay, so deeply does he venerate her nature, and so profoundly does he feel the loss of her respect or love,

that when all offences are forgiven, he absolutely revels like an eagle in the restored sunshine of some fair correspondent's eyes. In many respects, these letters are more wonderful than his poems; and their study, after such philosophical fashion, an occupation as well as an amusement, to which the wisest reader may incline.

The subdivision or arrangement of our Author's literary correspondence, or rather to determine precisely where the line should be drawn between the literary and the general departments, has been a matter of some difficulty. By common arrangement, the literary correspondence is limited exclusively to his letters to Thomson, which are no doubt both literary and critical in the highest degree. But the letters to Johnson, although comparatively few, and in that sense unimportant, belong to the same category, and therefore ought not to be excluded; whilst the letters to Moore, and the earlier specimens of composition selected by our Author himself, at a later date, in his epistle addressed to Captain Riddel, are equally important in their own department. In a philosophical point of view, indeed, as we have already intimated, they are of the very highest importance; and in other respects have equal claims to a purely literary designation. These, therefore, without much hesitation, we have included in our selection; and as they are all of earlier dates, we have assigned them also precedence in place, as principal documents.

Of the strictly critical or literary correspondence itself there are two sorts, which we separate by distinctive titles accordingly—the one Principal, and the other Subsidiary or Subordinate. The Principal includes all the letters addressed directly to Johnson or to Thomson, about the proper position of which in the entire correspondence there can be no doubt: why they should ever have been separated we cannot understand. That there should be so few letters to Johnson now extant is indeed much to be regretted; but how their number should be so limited, except by accidental loss, we know not. The letters to Thomson, on the other hand, are so numerous, so well known, and so remarkable for their literary value in relation to Scottish song and music, that no commentary, beyond directing the reader's attention to them thus, is required; and having been carefully preserved and early submitted to editorial examina-

tion, they have been long before the world, as far as the world has a right to know them, in their own entirety.

Letters which we call Subsidiary or Subordinate, in a literary or sometimes in a critical point of view (for these terms are not always identical), are either such as were addressed on literary business to booksellers, publishers, editors, or collectors, with a view to obtain assistance and co-operation in literary work, or in some other way to promote the success of literary enterprise; such, for example, as the letters to Hill, Hoy, and Skinner; or such, on the other hand, as were addressed occasionally or accidentally to literary characters, although not expressly on his own literary concerns; or to others who had some sort of interest in literature, and, either as friends or admirers, found it expedient or agreeable to cultivate his acquaintance. Such we need hardly particularise, because they are comparatively few, and will be easily discriminated by their very style and titles.

The only sort of letters about the introduction of which in this division of our Author's correspondence, under any title whatever, we had some doubt, were those which are addressed directly to aristocratic patrons, or powerful political friends, with the avowed object of acknowledging their kindness or requesting the exercise of their influence in his favour. Such letters, although not strictly entitled to rank as purely literary productions, are just as far removed from what is commonly called general correspondence. They are at least elaborately, carefully, and, as a matter of course, elegantly written; and, as they refer to the prospects and interests of a man whose very existence was divided between the cultivation of literature and the painfulest anxieties of ordinary life, from which anxieties he was struggling in vain by these very applications to escape, they are admitted as subordinate within the limits of his literary correspondence, on these grounds.

Finally, there are one or two letters besides these, of a literary character to some extent, but so much mixed up with other letters on miscellaneous or indifferent topics, addressed to the same correspondent (Cunningham, for example), that we cannot prudently separate them from the rest, and reserve them therefore for a place with others in the next division of our work.



Engraved by G. Cook from a Photograph by J. E. Walker

KIRK ALLQWAY.

CORRESPONDENCE.

PRINCIPAL.

To Robert Riddel, Esq.

OF GLENRIDDEL.

MY DEAR SIR,

ON rummaging over some old papers I lighted on a MS. of my early years, in which I had determined to write myself out; as I was placed by fortune among a class of men to whom my ideas would have been nonsense. I had meant that the book should have lain by me, in the fond hope that some time or other, even after I was no more, my thoughts would fall into the hands of somebody capable of appreciating their value. It sets off thus:—

“OBSERVATIONS, HINTS, SONGS, SCRAPS OF POETRY, &c., by ROBERT BURNES; a man who had little art in making money, and still less in keeping it; but was, however, a man of some sense, a great deal of honesty, and unbounded goodwill to every creature, rational and irrational.—As he was but little indebted to scholastic education, and bred at a plough-tail, his performances must be strongly tinged with his unpolished, rustic way of life; but as I believe they are really his own, it may be some entertainment to a curious observer of human nature to see how a ploughman thinks, and feels, under the pressure of love, ambition, anxiety, grief, with the like cares and passions, which, however diversified by the modes and manners of life, operate pretty much alike, I believe, on all the species.”

“There are numbers in the world who do not want sense to make a figure, so much as an opinion of their own abilities to put them upon recording their observations, and allowing them the same importance which they do to those which appear in print.”—SHENSTONE.

“Pleasing, when youth is long expired, to trace
The forms our pencil, or our pen designed!
Such was our youthful air, and shape, and face,
Such the soft image of our youthful mind.”—*Ibid.*

April, 1783.

Notwithstanding all that has been said against love, respecting the folly and weakness it leads a young inexperienced mind into; still I think it in a great measure deserves the highest encomiums that have been passed upon it. If any thing on earth deserves the name of rapture or transport, it

is the feelings of green eighteen in the company of the mistress of his heart, when she repays him with an equal return of affection.

August.

There is certainly some connexion between love, and music, and poetry; and therefore, I have always thought it a fine touch of nature, that passage in a modern love composition:

“As towards her cot he jogg’d along,
Her name was frequent in his song.”

For my own part I never had the least thought or inclination of turning poet till I got once heartily in love, and then rhyme and song were in a manner the spontaneous language of my heart. The following composition was the first of my performances, and done at an early period of my life, when my heart glowed with honest warm simplicity; unacquainted and uncorrupted with the ways of a wicked world. The performance is, indeed, very puerile and silly; but I am always pleased with it, as it recalls to my mind those happy days when my heart was yet honest, and my tongue was sincere. The subject of it was a young girl who really deserved all the praises I have bestowed on her. I not only had this opinion of her then—but I actually think so still, now that the spell is long since broken, and the enchantment at an end.

O once I lov’d a bonnie lass.

Lest my works should be thought below criticism; or meet with a critic, who, perhaps, will not look on them with so candid and favourable an eye, I am determined to criticise them myself.

The first distich of the first stanza is quite too much in the flimsy strain of our ordinary street ballads; and, on the other hand, the second distich is too much in the other extreme. The expression is a little awkward, and the sentiment too serious. Stanza the second I am well pleased with; and I think it conveys a fine idea of that amiable part of the sex—the agreeables; or what in our Scotch dialect we call a sweet sonsie lass. The third stanza has a little of the flimsy turn in it; and the third line has rather too serious a cast. The fourth stanza is a very indifferent one; the first line,

is, indeed, all in the strain of the second stanza, but the rest is mere expletive. The thoughts in the fifth stanza come finely up to my favourite idea—a sweet sonsie lass: the last line, however, halts a little. The same sentiments are kept up with equal spirit and tenderness in the sixth stanza, but the second and fourth lines ending with short syllables hurt the whole. The seventh stanza has several minute faults; but I remember I composed it in a wild enthusiasm of passion, and to this hour I never recollect it but my heart melts, my blood sallies, at the remembrance.

[See song, "Handsome Nell," p. 186.]

September.

I entirely agree with that judicious philosopher, Mr. Smith, in his excellent Theory of Moral Sentiments, that remorse is the most painful sentiment that can embitter the human bosom. Any ordinary pitch of fortitude may bear up tolerably well under those calamities, in the procurement of which we ourselves have had no hand; but when our own follies, or crimes, have made us miserable and wretched, to bear up with manly firmness, and at the same time have a proper penitent sense of our misconduct, is a glorious effort of self-command.

Of all the numerous ills that hurt our peace,
That press the soul, or wring the mind with anguish,
Beyond comparison the worst are those
That to our folly or our guilt we owe.
In every other circumstance, the mind
Has this to say, 'It was no deed of mine;'
But when to all the evil of misfortune
This sting is added—'Blame thy foolish self!'
Or worse far, the pangs of keen remorse;
The torturing, gnawing consciousness of guilt—
Of guilt, perhaps, where we've involved others;
The young, the innocent, who fondly lov'd us,
Nay, more, that very love their cause of ruin!
O burning hell; in all thy store of torments
There's not a keener lash!
Lives there a man so firm, who, while his heart
Feels all the bitter horrors of his crime,
Can reason down its agonizing throbs;
And, after proper purpose of amendment,
Can firmly force his jarring thoughts to peace?
O, happy! happy! enviable man!
O glorious magnanimity of soul!

March, 1784.

I have often observed, in the course of my experience of human life, that every man, even the worst, has something good about him; though very often nothing else than a happy temperament of constitution inclining him to this or that virtue. For this reason, no man can say in what degree any person, besides himself, can be, with strict justice, called

wicked. Let any of the strictest character for regularity of conduct among us examine impartially how many vices he has never been guilty of, not from any care or vigilance, but for want of opportunity, or some accidental circumstance intervening; how many of the weaknesses of mankind he has escaped, because he was out of the line of such temptation; and, what often, if not always, weighs more than all the rest, how much he is indebted to the world's good opinion, because the world does not know all: I say, any man who can thus think, will scan the failings, nay, the faults and crimes, of mankind around him, with a brother's eye.

I have often courted the acquaintance of that part of mankind, commonly known by the ordinary phrase of blackguards, sometimes farther than was consistent with the safety of my character; those who, by thoughtless prodigality or headstrong passions, have been driven to ruin. Though disgraced by follies, nay, sometimes, stained with guilt, I have yet found among them, in not a few instances, some of the noblest virtues, magnanimity, generosity, disinterested friendship, and even modesty.

April.

As I am what the men of the world, if they knew such a man, would call a whimsical mortal, I have various sources of pleasure and enjoyment, which are, in a manner, peculiar to myself, or some here and there such other out-of-the-way person. Such is the peculiar pleasure I take in the season of winter, more than the rest of the year. This, I believe, may be partly owing to my misfortunes giving my mind a melancholy cast: but there is something even in the

"Mighty tempest, and the hoary waste
Abrupt and deep, stretch'd o'er the buried earth,"

which raises the mind to a serious sublimity, favourable to every thing great and noble. There is scarcely any earthly object gives me more—I do not know if I should call it pleasure—but something which exalts me, something which enraptures me—than to walk in the sheltered side of a wood, or high plantation, in a cloudy winter-day, and hear the stormy wind howling among the trees, and raving over the plain. It is my best season for devotion; my mind is wrapt up in a kind of enthusiasm to Him, who, in the pompous language of the Hebrew bard, "walks on the wings of the winds." In one of these seasons, just after a train of misfortunes, I composed the following:—

The wintry West extends his blast.

[See Poetical Works, p. 54.]

Shenstone finely observes, that love-verses, writ without any real passion, are the most nauseous of all conceits: and I have often thought that no man can be a proper critic of love-composition, except he himself, in one or more instances, has been a warm votary of this passion. As I have been all along a miserable dupe to love, and have been led into a thousand weaknesses and follies by it, for that reason I put the more confidence in my critical skill, in distinguishing foppery and conceit from real passion and nature. Whether the following

song will stand the test, I will not pretend to say, because it is my own; only I can say it was, at the time, genuine from the heart:—

Behind yon hills where Stinchar flows.

[See Poetical Works, p. 75.]

March, 1784.

There was a certain period of my life that my spirit was broke by repeated losses and disasters which threatened, and indeed effected, the utter ruin of my fortune. My body, too, was attacked by that most dreadful distemper, a hypochondria or confirmed melancholy. In this wretched state, the recollection of which makes me yet shudder, I hung my harp on the willow-trees, except in some lucid intervals, in one of which I composed the following:—

O thou Great Being! what Thou art.

[See Poetical Works, p. 56.]

April.

The following song is a wild rhapsody, miserably deficient in versification; but as the sentiments are the genuine feelings of my heart, for that reason I have a particular pleasure in conning it over.

My father was a farmer
Upon the Carrick border, O.

[See Posthumous Works.]

April.

I think the whole species of young men may be naturally enough divided into two grand classes, which I shall call the *grave* and the *merry*; though, by the by, these terms do not with propriety enough express my ideas. The *grave* I shall cast into the usual division of those who are goaded on by the love of money, and those whose darling wish is to make a figure in the world. The *merry* are the men of pleasure of all denominations; the jovial lads, who have too much fire and spirit to have any settled rule of action; but, without much deliberation, follow the strong impulses of nature: the thoughtless, the careless, the indolent—in particular *he* who, with a happy sweetness of natural temper, and a cheerful vacancy of thought, steals through life—generally, indeed, in poverty and obscurity; but poverty and obscurity are only evils to him who can sit gravely down and make a repining comparison between his own situation and that of others; and lastly, to grace the quorum, such are, generally, those whose heads are capable of all the towerings of genius, and whose hearts are warmed with all the delicacy of feeling.

August.

The foregoing was to have been an elaborate dissertation on the various species of men: but as I cannot please myself in the arrangement of my ideas, I must wait till farther experience and nicer observation throw more light on the subject. In the meantime I shall set down the following fragment, which, as it is the genuine language of my heart, will enable anybody to determine which of the classes I belong to:—

There's nought but care on ev'ry han',
In ev'ry hour that passes, O.*

As the grand end of human life is to cultivate an intercourse with that BEING to whom we owe life, with every enjoyment that renders life delightful; and to maintain an integrative conduct towards our fellow-creatures; that so, by forming piety and virtue into habit, we may be fit members for that society of the pious and the good, which reason and revelation teach us to expect beyond the grave, I do not see that the turn of mind, and pursuits of such an one as the above verses describe—one who spends the hours and thoughts which the vocations of the day can spare with Ossian, Shakespeare, Thomson, Shenstone, Sterne, &c.; or, as the maggot takes him, a gun, a fiddle, or a song to make or mend; and at all times some heart's-dear bonnie lass in view—I say I do not see that the turn of mind and pursuits of such an one are in the least more inimical to the sacred interests of piety and virtue, than the even lawful bustling and straining after the world's riches and honours: and I do not see but he may gain heaven as well—which, by the by, is no mean consideration—who steals through the vale of life, amusing himself with every little flower that fortune throws in his way, as he, who straining straight forward, and perhaps spattering all about him, gains some of life's little eminences, where, after all, he can only see and be seen a little more conspicuously than what, in the pride of his heart, he is apt to term the poor, indolent devil he has left behind him.

* [See Poetical Works, p. 76.]

August.

A Prayer, when fainting fits, and other alarming symptoms of a pleurisy or some other dangerous disorder, which indeed still threatens me, first put nature on the alarm:—

O thou unknown, Almighty Causo
Of all my hope and fear!

[See Poetical Works, p. 54.]

August.

Misgivings in the hour of *despondency* and prospect of death:—

Why am I loth to leave this earthly scene?

[See Poetical Works, p. 55.]

EGOTISMS FROM MY OWN SENSATIONS.

May [8].

I don't well know what is the reason of it, but somehow or other, though I am when I have a mind pretty generally beloved, yet I never could get the art of commanding respect. I imagine it is owing to my being deficient in what Sterne calls "that understrapping virtue of discretion." I am so apt to a *lapsus lingue*, that I sometimes think the character of a certain great man I have read of somewhere is very much *apropos* to myself—that he was a compound of great talents and great folly. N.B.—To try if I can discover the causes of this wretched infirmity, and, if possible, to mend it.

August.

However I am pleased with the works of our Scotch poets, particularly the excellent Ramsay, and the still more excellent Fergusson, yet I am hurt to see other places of Scotland, their towns, rivers, woods, haughs, &c., immortalized in such celebrated performances, while my dear native country, the ancient baileries of Carrick, Kyle, and Cunningham, famous both in ancient and modern times for a gallant and warlike race of inhabitants—a country where civil, and particularly religious liberty have ever found their first support, and their last asylum; a country, the birth-place of many famous philosophers, soldiers, statesmen, and the scene of many important events recorded in Scottish history, particularly a great many of the actions of the glorious WALLACE the SAVIOUR of his country—yet, we have never had one Scotch poet of any eminence, to make the fertile banks of Irvine, the romantic woodlands and sequestered scenes on Ayr, and the heathy mountainous source and winding sweep of Doon, emulate Tay, Forth, Ettrick, Tweed, &c. This is a complaint I would gladly remedy, but, alas! I am far unequal to the task, both in native genius and education. Obscure I am, and obscure I must be, though no young poet, nor young soldier's heart, ever beat more fondly for fame than mine—

"And if there is no other scene of being
Where my insatiate wish may have its fill,—
This something at my heart that heaves for room,
My best, my dearest part, was made in vain."

September.

There is a great irregularity in the old Scotch songs, a redundancy of syllables with respect to that exactness of accent and measure that the English poetry requires, but which glides in, most melodiously, with the respective tunes to which they are set. For instance, the fine old song of "The Mill, Mill, O," to give it a plain, prosaic reading, it halts prodigiously out of measure; on the other hand, the song set to the same tune in Bremner's collection of Scotch songs, which begins "To Fanny fair could I impart," &c., is most exact measure; and yet, let them both be sung before a real critic, one above the biases of prejudice but a thorough judge

of nature, how flat and spiritless will the last appear, how trite, and lamely methodical, compared with the wild warbling cadence, the heart-moving melody of the first!—This is particularly the case with all those airs which end with a hypermetrical syllable. There is a degree of wild irregularity in many of the compositions and fragments which are daily sung to them by my compeers, the common people—a certain happy arrangement of old Scotch syllables, and yet, very frequently, nothing, not even like rhyme, or sameness of jingle, at the ends of the lines. This has made me sometimes imagine that perhaps it might be possible for a Scotch poet, with a nice judicious ear, to set compositions to many of our most favourite airs, particularly that class of them mentioned above, independent of rhyme altogether.

There is a noble sublimity, a heart-melting tenderness, in some of our ancient ballads, which show them to be the work of a masterly hand: and it has often given me many a heart-ache to reflect that such glorious old bards—bards who very probably owed all their talents to native genius, yet have described the exploits of heroes, the pangs of disappointment, and the meltings of love, with such fine strokes of nature—that their very names (O how mortifying to a bard's vanity!) are now "buried among the wreck of things which were."

O ye illustrious names unknown! who could feel so strongly and describe so well: the last, the meanest of the Muses' train—one who, though far inferior to your flights, yet eyes your path, and with trembling wing would sometimes soar after you—a poor rustic bard unknown, pays this sympathetic pang to your memory! Some of you tell us, with all the charms of verse, that you have been unfortunate in the world—unfortunate in love: he, too, has felt the loss of his little fortune, the loss of friends, and, worse than all, the loss of the woman he adored. Like you, all his consolation was his Muse: she taught him in rustic measures to complain. Happy could he have done it with your strength of imagination and flow of verse! May the turf lie lightly on your bones! and may you now enjoy that solace and rest which this world rarely gives to the heart tuned to all the feelings of poesy and love!

September [8].

The following fragment is done something in imitation of the manner of a noble old Scottish piece, called M'Millan's Peggy, and sings to the tune of Galla Water.—My Montgomery's Peggy was my deity for six or eight months. She had been bred (though, as the world says, without any just pretence for it) in a style of life rather elegant; but, as Vanburgh says in one of his comedies, my "d—d star found me out" there too; for though I began the affair merely in a *gaieté de cœur*, or, to tell the truth, which will scarcely be believed, a vanity of showing my parts in courtship, par-

ticularly my abilities at a *billet-doux*, which I always piqued myself upon, made me lay siege to her; and when, as I always do in my foolish gallantries, I had battered* myself into a very warm affection for her, she told me one day, in a flag of truce, that her fortress had been for some time before the rightful property of another; but, with the greatest friendship and politeness, she offered me every alliance except actual possession. I found out afterwards that what she told me of a pre-engagement was really true; but it cost me some heart-aches to get rid of the affair.

I have even tried to imitate in this extempore thing that irregularity in the rhymes, which, when judiciously done, has such a fine effect on the ear.

“Altho’ my bed were in yon muir.”

*[This word seems to be very doubtful in original, for Cunningham prints it ‘fettered,’ whereas Chambers as above. If the original has it written ‘battered,’ then the word must be understood in the old Scotch sense of to *build up*, as in building a wall to the cope.]

September.

There is another fragment in imitation of an old Scotch song, well known among the country ingle sides.—I cannot tell the name, neither of the song nor the tune, but they are in fine unison with one another.—By the way, these old Scottish airs are so nobly sentimental, that when one would compose to them, to “sowth the tune,” as our Scotch phrase is, over and over, is the readiest way to catch the inspiration, and raise the bard into that glorious enthusiasm so strongly characteristic of our old Scotch poetry. I shall here set down one verse of the piece mentioned above, both to mark the song and tune I mean, and likewise as a debt I owe to the author, as the repeating of that verse has lighted up my flame a thousand times:—

When clouds in skies do come together
To hide the brightness of the sun,
There will surely be some pleasant weather
When a’ their storms are past and gone.*

Though fickle fortune has deceived me,
She promis’d fair and perform’d but ill;
Of mistress, friends, and wealth bereav’d me,
Yet I bear a heart shall support me still.

I’ll act with prudence as far as I’m able,
But if success I must never find,
Then come misfortune, I bid thee welcome,
I’ll meet thee with an undaunted mind.

* Alluding to the misfortunes he feelingly laments before this verse.—R. B.

The above was an extempore, under the pressure of a heavy train of misfortunes, which, indeed, threatened to undo me altogether. It was just at the close of that dreadful period mentioned already,* and though the weather has brightened up a little with me, yet there has always been since a tempest

brewing round me in the grim sky of futurity, which I pretty plainly see will some time or other, perhaps ere long, overwhelm me, and drive me into some doleful dell, to pine in solitary, squalid wretchedness.—However, as I hope my poor country Muse, who, all rustic, awkward, and unpolished as she is, has more charms for me than any other of the pleasures of life beside—as I hope she will not then desert me, I may even then learn to be, if not happy, at least easy, and *sowth a sang* to soothe my misery.

’Twas at the same time I set about composing an air in the old Scotch style.—I am not musical scholar enough to prick down my tune properly, so it can never see the light, and perhaps ’tis no great matter; but the following were the verses I composed to suit it:—

O raging fortune’s withering blast
Has laid my leaf full low, O!

[See Posthumous Works.]

The tune consisted of three parts, so that the above verses just went through the whole air.

*[Commonplace-Book, date March, 1784.]

October, 1785.

If ever any young man, in the vestibule of the world, chance to throw his eye over these pages, let him pay a warm attention to the following observations, as I assure him they are the fruit of a poor devil’s dear-bought experience. I have literally, like that great poet and great gallant, and by consequence, that great fool, Solomon, “turned my eyes to behold madness and folly.” Nay, I have, with all the ardour of a lively, fanciful, and whimsical imagination, accompanied with a warm, feeling, poetic heart, shaken hands with their intoxicating friendship.

In the first place, let my pupil, as he tenders his own peace, keep up a regular, warm intercourse with the Deity. * * *

This is all worth quoting in my MSS. and more than all.

R. B.

[See Appendix.]

(1.) To Dr. Moore.

Edinburgh [January], 1787.

SIR,

Mrs. DUNLOP has been so kind as to send me extracts of letters she has had from you, where you do the rustic bard the honour of noticing him and his works. Those who have felt the anxieties and solitudes of authorship, can only know what pleasure it gives to be noticed in such a manner by judges of the first character. Your criticisms, Sir, I receive with reverence: only I am sorry they mostly came too late; a peccant passage or two that I would certainly have altered, were gone to the press.

The hope to be admired for ages, is, in by far the greater part of those even who are authors of repute, an unsubstantial dream. For my part, my first ambition was, and still my strongest wish is, to please my compeers, the rustic inmates of the hamlet, while ever-changing language and manners shall allow me to be relished and understood. I am very willing to admit that I have some poetical abilities; and as few, if any, writers, either moral or poetical, are intimately acquainted with the classes of mankind among whom I have chiefly mingled, I may have seen men and manners in a different phasis from what is common, which may assist originality of thought. Still I know very well the novelty of my character has by far the greatest share in the learned and polite notice I have lately had; and in a language where Pope and Churchill have raised the laugh, and Shenstone and Gray have drawn the tear; where Thomson and Beattie have painted the landscape, and Lyttelton and Collins described the heart, I am not vain enough to hope for distinguished poetic fame.

R. B.

(2.) TO DR. MOORE.

Edinburgh, 15th February, 1787.

SIR,

PARDON my seeming neglect in delaying so long to acknowledge the honour you have done me, in your kind notice of me, January 23rd. Not many months ago I knew no other employment than following the plough, nor could boast any thing higher than a distant acquaintance with a country clergyman. Mere greatness never embarrasses me; I have nothing to ask from the great, and I do not fear their judgment: but genius, polished by learning, and at its proper point of elevation in the eye of the world, this of late I frequently meet with, and tremble at its approach. I scorn the affectation of seeming modesty to cover self-conceit. That I have some merit I do not deny; but I see with frequent wringings of heart, that the novelty of my character, and the honest national prejudice of my countrymen have borne me to a height altogether untenable to my abilities.

For the honour Miss Williams has done me, please, Sir, return her in my name my most grateful thanks. I have more than once thought of paying her in kind, but have hitherto quitted the idea in hopeless despondency. I had never before heard of her; but the other day I got her poems, which for several reasons, some belonging to the head, and others the offspring of the heart, give me a great deal of pleasure. I have little pretensions to critic lore: there are, I think, two characteristic features in her poetry—the unfettered wild flight of native genius, and the querulous, sombre tenderness of “time-settled sorrow.”

I only know what pleases me, often without being able to tell why.

R. B.

(3.) TO DR. MOORE.

Edinburgh, 23rd April, 1787.

I RECEIVED the books, and sent the one you mentioned to Mrs. Dunlop. I am ill skilled in beating the coverts of imagination for metaphors of gratitude. I thank you, Sir, for the honour you have done me; and to my latest hour will warmly remember it. To be highly pleased with your book is what I have in common with the world; but to regard these volumes as a mark of the author's friendly esteem, is a still more supreme gratification.

I leave Edinburgh in the course of ten days or a fortnight, and after a few pilgrimages over some of the classic ground of Caledonia, Cowden Knowes, Banks of Yarrow, Tweed, &c., I shall return to my rural shades, in all likelihood never more to quit them. I have formed many intimacies and friendships here, but I am afraid they are all of too tender a construction to bear carriage a hundred and fifty miles. To the rich, the great, the fashionable, the polite, I have no equivalent to offer; and I am afraid my meteor appearance will by no means entitle me to a settled correspondence with any of you, who are the permanent lights of genius and literature.

My most respectful compliments to Miss Williams. If once this tangent flight of mine were over, and I were returned to my wonted leisurely motion in my old circle, I may probably endeavour to return her poetic compliment in kind.

R. B.

(4.) TO DR. MOORE.

[AUTHOR'S CELEBRATED AUTOBIOGRAPHY.]

Mauchline, 2nd August, 1787.

SIR,

FOR some months past I have been rambling over the country, but I am now confined with some lingering complaints, originating, as I take it, in the stomach. To divert my spirits a little in this miserable fog of *ennui*, I have taken a whim to give you a history of myself. My name has made some little noise in this country; you have done me the honour to interest yourself very warmly in my behalf; and I think a faithful account of what character of a man I am, and how I came by that character, may perhaps amuse you in an idle moment, I will give you an honest narrative, though I know it will be often at my own expense; for I assure you, Sir, I have, like Solomon, whose character, excepting in the trifling affair of *wisdom*, I sometimes think I resemble,—I have, I say, like him “turned my eyes to behold madness and folly,” and like him, too, frequently shaken hands with their intoxicating friendship.—After you have perused these pages, should you think them trifling and impertinent, I only beg leave to tell you, that the poor author wrote them under some twitching qualms of conscience, arising from a suspicion that he was doing what he

ought not to do; a predicament he has more than once been in before.

I have not the most distant pretensions to assume that character which the pye-coated guardians of escutcheons call a gentleman. When at Edinburgh last winter, I got acquainted in the herald's office; and, looking through that granary of honours, I there found almost every name in the kingdom: but for me

"My ancient but ignoble blood
Has crept thro' scoundrels ever since the flood."

POPE.

Gules, Purple, Argent, &c., quite disowned me.

My father was of the north of Scotland, the son of a farmer, and was thrown by early misfortunes on the world at large; where, after many years' wanderings and sojournings, he picked up a pretty large quantity of observation and experience, to which I am indebted for most of my little pretensions to wisdom. I have met with few who understood men, their manners, and their ways, equal to him; but stubborn, ungainly integrity, and headlong, ungovernable irascibility, are disqualifying circumstances; consequently, I was born a very poor man's son. For the first six or seven years of my life, my father was gardener to a worthy gentleman of small estate in the neighbourhood of Ayr. Had he continued in that station, I must have marched off to be one of the little underlings about a farm-house; but it was his dearest wish and prayer to have it in his power to keep his children under his own eye, till they could discern between good and evil; so, with the assistance of his generous master, my father ventured on a small farm on his estate. At those years, I was by no means a favourite with anybody. I was a good deal noted for a retentive memory, a stubborn sturdy something in my disposition, and an enthusiastic idiot piety. I say *idiot* piety, because I was then but a child. Though it cost the schoolmaster some thrashings, I made an excellent English scholar; and by the time I was ten or eleven years of age, I was a critic in substantives, verbs, and particles. In my infant and boyish days, too, I owed much to an old woman who resided in the family, remarkable for her ignorance, credulity, and superstition. She had, I suppose, the largest collection in the country of tales and songs concerning devils, ghosts, fairies, brownies, witches, warlocks, spunkies, kelpies, elf-candles, dead-lights, wraiths, apparitions, cantraps, giants, enchanted towers, dragons, and other trumpery. This cultivated the latent seeds of poetry; but had so strong an effect on my imagination, that to this hour, in my nocturnal rambles, I sometimes keep a sharp look out in suspicious places; and though nobody can be more sceptical than I am in such matters, yet it often takes an effort of philosophy to shake off these idle terrors. The earliest composition that I recollect taking pleasure in, was *The Vision of Mirza*, and a hymn of Addison's beginning, "How are thy servants blest, O Lord!" I particularly remember one half-stanza which was music to my boyish ear—

"For though in dreadful whirls we hung
High on the broken wave"—

I met with these pieces in Mason's English Collection, one of my school-books. The first two books I ever read in private,

and which gave me more pleasure than any two books I ever read since, were *The Life of Hannibal*, and *The History of Sir William Wallace*. Hannibal gave my young ideas such a turn, that I used to strut in raptures up and down after the recruiting drum and bag-pipe, and wish myself tall enough to be a soldier; while the story of Wallace poured a Scottish prejudice into my veins, which will boil along there till the flood-gates of life shut in eternal rest.

Polemical divinity about this time was putting the country half mad, and I, ambitious of shining in conversation parties on Sundays, between sermons, at funerals, &c., used a few years afterwards to puzzle Calvinism with so much heat and indiscretion, that I raised a hue and cry of heresy against me, which has not ceased to this hour.

My vicinity to Ayr was of some advantage to me. My social disposition, when not checked by some modifications of spirited pride, was like our catechism definition of infinitude, "without bounds or limits." I formed several connexions with other youngers, who possessed superior advantages; the youngling actors who were busy in the rehearsal of parts, in which they were shortly to appear on the stage of life, where, alas! I was destined to drudge behind the scenes. It is not commonly at this green age that our young gentry have a just sense of the immense distance that lies between them and their ragged playfellows. It takes a few dashes into the world, to give the young great man that proper, decent, unnoticing disregard for the poor, insignificant, stupid devils, the mechanics and peasantry around him, who were, perhaps, born in the same village. My young superiors never insulted the clouterly appearance of my plough-boy carcase, the two extremes of which were often exposed to all the inclemencies of all the seasons. They would give me stray volumes of books; among them, even then, I could pick up some observations, and one, whose heart, I am sure, not even the "Munny Begum" scenes have tainted, helped me to a little French. Parting with these my young friends and benefactors, as they occasionally went off for the East or West Indies, was often to me a sore affliction; but I was soon called to more serious evils. My father's generous master died! the farm proved a ruinous bargain; and to clench the misfortune, we fell into the hands of a factor, who sat for the picture I have drawn of one in my tale of "*The Twa Dogs*." My father was advanced in life when he married; I was the eldest of seven children, and he, worn out by early hardships, was unfit for labour. My father's spirit was soon irritated, but not easily broken. There was a freedom in his lease in two years more, and to weather these two years, we retrenched our expenses. We lived very poorly: I was a dexterous ploughman for my age; and the next eldest to me was a brother (Gilbert), who could drive the plough very well, and help me to thrash the corn. A novel-writer might, perhaps, have viewed these scenes with some satisfaction, but so did not I; my indignation yet boils at the recollection of the scoundrel factor's insolent threatening letters, which used to set us all in tears.

This kind of life—the cheerless gloom of a hermit, with the unceasing moil of a galley-slave, brought me to my sixteenth year; a little before which period I first committed the sin of

rhyme. You know our country custom of coupling a man and woman together as partners in the labours of harvest. In my fifteenth autumn, my partner was a bewitching creature, a year younger than myself. My scarcity of English denies me the power of doing her justice in that language, but you know the Scottish idiom: she was a "bonnie, sweet, sonsie lass." In short, she, altogether unwittingly to herself, initiated me in that delicious passion, which, in spite of acid disappointment, gin-horse prudence, and book-worm philosophy, I hold to be the first of human joys, our dearest blessing here below! How she caught the contagion I cannot tell; you medical people talk much of infection from breathing the same air, the touch, &c.; but I never expressly said I loved her.—Indeed, I did not know myself why I liked so much to loiter behind with her, when returning in the evening from our labours; why the tones of her voice made my heart-strings thrill like an Æolian harp; and particularly why my pulse beat such a furious rattan, when I looked and fingered over her little hand to pick out the cruel nettle-stings and thistles. Among her other love-inspiring qualities, she sung sweetly; and it was her favourite reel to which I attempted giving an embodied vehicle in rhyme. I was not so presumptuous as to imagine that I could make verses like printed ones, composed by men who had Greek and Latin; but my girl sung a song which was said to be composed by a small country laird's son, on one of his father's maids, with whom he was in love; and I saw no reason why I might not rhyme as well as he; for, excepting that he could smear sheep, and cast peats, his father living in the moorlands, he had no more scholar-craft than myself.

Thus with me began love and poetry; which at times have been my only, and till within the last twelve months, have been my highest enjoyment. My father struggled on till he reached the freedom in his lease, when he entered on a larger farm, about ten miles farther in the country. The nature of the bargain he made was such as to throw a little ready money into his hands at the commencement of his lease, otherwise the affair would have been impracticable. For four years we lived comfortably here, but a difference commencing between him and his landlord as to terms, after three years' tossing and whirling in the vortex of litigation, my father was just saved from the horrors of a jail, by a consumption, which, after two years' promises, kindly stepped in, and carried him away, to "where the wicked cease from troubling, and where the weary are at rest!"

It is during the time that we lived on this farm, that my little story is most eventful. I was, at the beginning of this period, perhaps, the most ungainly awkward boy in the parish—no *solitaire* was less acquainted with the ways of the world. What I knew of ancient story was gathered from Salmon's and Guthrie's Geographical Grammars; and the ideas I had formed of modern manners, of literature, and criticism, I got from the Spectator. These, with Pope's Works, some Plays of Shakespeare, Tull and Dickson on Agriculture, The Pantheon, Locke's Essay on the Human Understanding, Stackhouse's History of the Bible, Justice's British Gardener's Directory, Boyle's Lectures, Allan Ramsay's Works, Taylor's Scripture Doctrine of Original Sin, A Select Collection of English Songs,

and Hervey's Meditations, had formed the whole of my reading. The collection of Songs was my *vade mecum*. I pored over them, driving my cart, or walking to labour, song by song, verse by verse; carefully noting the true tender, or sublime, from affectation or fustian. I am convinced I owe to this practice much of my critic-craft, such as it is.*

In my seventeenth year, to give my manners a brush, I went to a country dancing-school. My father had an unaccountable antipathy against these meetings, and my going was, what to this moment I repent, in opposition to his wishes. My father, as I said before, was subject to strong passions; from that instance of disobedience in me, he took a sort of dislike to me, which, I believe, was one cause of the dissipation which marked my succeeding years.† I say dissipation, comparatively with the strictness, and sobriety, and regularity of Presbyterian country life; for though the will-o'-wisp meteors of thoughtless whim were almost the sole lights of my path, yet early engrained piety and virtue kept me for several years afterwards within the line of innocence. The great misfortune of my life was to want an aim. I had felt early some stirrings of ambition, but they were the blind gropings of Homer's Cyclops round the walls of his cave. I saw my father's situation entailed on me perpetual labour. The only two openings by which I could enter the temple of fortune was the gate of niggardly economy, or the path of little chicaning bargain-making. The first is so contracted an aperture I never could squeeze myself into it—the last I always hated—there was contamination in the very entrance! Thus abandoned of aim or view in life, with a strong appetite for sociability, as well from native hilarity, as from a pride of observation and remark; a constitutional melancholy or hypochondriasm that made me fly solitude; add to these incentives to social life, my reputation for bookish knowledge, a certain wild logical talent, and a strength of thought, something like the rudiments of good sense; and it will not seem surprising that I was generally a welcome guest where I visited, or any great wonder that always, where two or three met together, there was I among them. But far beyond all other impulses of my heart, was *un penchant à l'adorable moitié du genre humain*. My heart was completely tinder, and was eternally lighted up by some goddess or other; and, as in every other warfare in this world, my fortune was various; sometimes I was received with favour, and sometimes I was mortified with a repulse. At the plough, scythe, or reap-hook, I feared no competitor, and thus I set absolute want at defiance; and as I never cared farther for my labours than while I was in actual exercise, I spent the evenings in the way after my own heart. A country lad seldom carries on a love adventure without an assisting confidant. I possessed a curiosity, zeal, and intrepid

* [In the catalogue of books here transcribed, "Boyle's Lectures" has been misprinted by Currie "Bayle's Lectures." This inaccuracy was first pointed out by Chambers. The Select Collection of Songs here referred to was entitled "The Lark," a book published by Gordon of Edinburgh, in 1765. It contains 324 close printed pages, with some fine old songs and ballads, but a good deal also of inferior versification in its contents. From this little museum the Poet seems early to have picked up such names as Chloris and Chloë, which frequently occur on its pages.]

† [We have only again to state that the Author's remarks about his father's aversion to himself, and his own dissipation, are very much exaggerated; for what reason, it is not easy to conjecture.]

dexterity that recommended me as a proper second on these occasions; and I dare say, I felt as much pleasure in being in the secret of half the loves of the parish of Tarbolton, as ever did statesman in knowing the intrigues of half the courts of Europe. The very goose-feather in my hand seems to know instinctively the well-worn path of my imagination, the favourite theme of my song; and is with difficulty restrained from giving you a couple of paragraphs on the love-adventures of my compeers, the humble inmates of the farmhouse and cottage; but the grave sons of science, ambition, or avarice baptize these things by the name of follies. To the sons and daughters of labour and poverty they are matters of the most serious nature: to them the ardent hope, the stolen interview, the tender farewell, are the greatest and most delicious parts of their enjoyments.

Another circumstance in my life which made some alteration in my mind and manners, was, that I spent my seventeenth summer on a smuggling coast, a good distance from home, at a noted school, to learn mensuration, surveying, dialling, &c., in which I made a pretty good progress.* But I made a greater progress in the knowledge of mankind. The contraband trade was at that time very successful, and it sometimes happened to me to fall in with those who carried it on. Scenes of swaggering riot and roaring dissipation were, till this time, new to me; but I was no enemy to social life. Here, though I learned to fill my glass, and to mix without fear in a drunken squabble, yet I went on with a high hand with my geometry, till the sun entered Virgo, a month which is always a carnival in my bosom, when a charming *fillette*, who lived next door to the school, overset my trigonometry, and set me off at a tangent from the sphere of my studies. I, however, struggled on with my sines and co-sines for a few days more; but stepping into the garden one charming noon to take the sun's altitude, there I met my angel,

"Like Proserpine gathering flowers,
Herself a fairer flower——"†

It was in vain to think of doing any more good at school. The remaining week I staid I did nothing but craze the faculties of my soul about her, or steal out to meet her; and the two last nights of my stay in the country, had sleep been a mortal sin, the image of this modest and innocent girl had kept me guiltless.

* [The smuggling coast referred to, where the Author spent his seventeenth summer, was the Turnberry coast in Carrick; the village where his studies were then prosecuted, Kirkoswald; and the house where he resided with his maternal uncle Brown, a sweet picturesque locality by the roadside, in a glen about a mile to the west of that village—called Ballochneil. It was here, as the reader is aware, he became first acquainted with the original characters subsequently immortalised in 'Tam o' Shanter.' The date of his residence there has been long disputed,—the *nineteenth* and not the seventeenth summer having hitherto been universally printed; which undoubtedly implied miscalculation. We learn by a note in the *Inverness Courier* (June 11th, 1868) to whose accomplished editor we are indebted for the information, that this error was occasioned by Dr. Currie; who, not being satisfied about the date in question, deliberately struck out *seventeenth* and substituted *nineteenth*, which has ever since been adopted in all editions of the Poet's works. We are happy to be able to make this rectification in time.]

† [This quotation by our Author, from memory, doubtless, is slightly inaccurate in its form: the word "like" does not belong to Milton, and should not have been included in the quotation. The reader will find the passage in "Paradise Lost," b. iv., l. 268.]

I returned home very considerably improved. My reading was enlarged with the very important addition of Thomson's and Shenstone's works; I had seen human nature in a new phasis; and I engaged several of my schoolfellows to keep up a literary correspondence with me. This improved me in composition. I had met with a collection of letters by the wits of Queen Anne's reign, and I pored over them most devoutly. I kept copies of any of my own letters that pleased me, and a comparison between them and the composition of most of my correspondents flattered my vanity. I carried this whim so far, that though I had not three-farthings' worth of business in the world, yet almost every post brought me as many letters as if I had been a broad plodding son of the day-book and ledger.

My life flowed on much in the same course till my twenty-third year. *Vive l'amour, et vive la bagatelle*, were my sole principles of action. The addition of two more authors to my library gave me great pleasure; Sterne and Mackenzie—Tristram Shandy and the Man of Feeling were my bosom favourites. Poesy was still a darling walk for my mind, but it was only indulged in according to the humour of the hour. I had usually half a dozen or more pieces on hand; I took up one or other, as it suited the momentary tone of the mind, and dismissed the work as it bordered on fatigue. My passions, when once lighted up, raged like so many devils, till they got vent in rhyme; and then the conning over my verses, like a spell, soothed all into quiet! None of the rhymes of those days are in print, except "Winter, a dirge," the eldest of my printed pieces; "The Death of poor Mailie," "John Barleycorn," and songs first, second, and third. Song second was the ebullition of that passion which ended the forementioned school-business.

My twenty-third year was to me an important æra. Partly through whim, and partly that I wished to set about doing something in life, I joined a flax-dresser in a neighbouring town (Irvine), to learn his trade. This was an unlucky affair. My * * * and to finish the whole, as we were giving a welcome carousal to the new year, the shop took fire and burnt to ashes, and I was left, like a true poet, not worth a sixpence.

I was obliged to give up this scheme; the clouds of misfortune were gathering thick round my father's head; and, what was worst of all, he was visibly far gone in a consumption; and to crown my distresses, a *belle fille*, whom I adored, and who had pledged her soul to meet me in the field of matrimony, jilted me, with peculiar circumstances of mortification. The finishing evil that brought up the rear of this infernal file, was my constitutional melancholy being increased to such a degree, that for three months I was in a state of mind scarcely to be envied by the hopeless wretches who have got their mittimus—depart from me, ye cursed!

From this adventure I learned something of a town life; but the principal thing which gave my mind a turn, was a friendship I formed with a young fellow, a very noble character, but a hapless son of misfortune. He was the son of a simple mechanic; but a great man in the neighbourhood taking him under his patronage, gave him a genteel education, with a view of bettering his situation in life. The patron dying just as he was ready to launch out into the

world, the poor fellow in despair went to sea; where, after a variety of good and ill-fortune, a little before I was acquainted with him he had been set on shore by an American privateer, on the wild coast of Connaught, stripped of every thing. I cannot quit this poor fellow's story without adding, that he is at this time master of a large West-Indiaman belonging to the Thames.

His mind was fraught with independence, magnanimity, and every manly virtue. I loved and admired him to a degree of enthusiasm, and of course strove to imitate him. In some measure I succeeded; I had pride before, but he taught it to flow in proper channels. His knowledge of the world was vastly superior to mine, and I was all attention to learn. He was the only man I ever saw who was a greater fool than myself where woman was the presiding star; but he spoke of illicit love with the levity of a sailor, which hitherto I had regarded with horror. Here his friendship did me a mischief, and the consequence was, that soon after I resumed the plough, I wrote the "Poet's Welcome." My reading only increased while in this town by two stray volumes of Pamela, and one of Ferdinand Count Fathom, which gave me some idea of novels. Rhyme, except some religious pieces that are in print, I had given up; but meeting with Fergusson's Scottish Poems, I strung anew my wildly-sounding lyre with emulating vigour. When my father died, his all went among the hell-hounds that growl in the kennel of justice; but we made a shift to collect a little money in the family amongst us, with which, to keep us together, my brother and I took a neighbouring farm. My brother wanted my hair-brained imagination, as well as my social and amorous madness; but in good sense, and every sober qualification, he was far my superior.

I entered on this farm with a full resolution, "come, go to, I will be wise!" I read farming books, I calculated crops; I attended markets; and in short, in spite of the devil, and the world, and the flesh, I believe I should have been a wise man; but the first year, from unfortunately buying bad seed, the second from a late harvest, we lost half our crops. This upset all my wisdom, and I returned, "like the dog to his vomit, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire."

I now began to be known in the neighbourhood as a maker of rhymes. The first of my poetic offspring that saw the light was a burlesque lamentation on a quarrel between two reverend Calvinists both of them *dramatis personæ* in my "Holy Fair." I had a notion myself that the piece had some merit; but, to prevent the worst, I gave a copy of it to a friend, who was very fond of such things, and told him that I could not guess who was the author of it, but that I thought it pretty clever. With a certain description of the clergy, as well as laity, it met with a roar of applause. "Holy Willie's Prayer" next made its appearance, and alarmed the kirk-session so much, that they held several meetings to look over their spiritual artillery, if haply any of it might be pointed against profane rhymers. Unluckily for me, my wanderings led me on another side, within point-blank shot of their heaviest metal. This is the unfortunate story that gave rise to my printed poem, "The Lament." This was a most

melancholy affair, which I cannot yet bear to reflect on, and had very nearly given me one or two of the principal qualifications for a place among those who have lost the chart, and mistaken the reckoning of rationality. I gave up my part of the farm to my brother; in truth it was only nominally mine; and made what little preparation was in my power for Jamaica. But, before leaving my native country for ever, I resolved to publish my poems. I weighed my productions as impartially as was in my power: I thought they had merit; and it was a delicious idea that I should be called a clever fellow, even though it should never reach my ears—a poor negro-driver—or perhaps a victim to that inhospitable clime, and gone to the world of spirits! I can truly say, that *pauvre inconnu* as I then was, I had pretty nearly as high an idea of myself and of my works as I have at this moment, when the public has decided in their favour. It ever was my opinion that the mistakes and blunders, both in a rational and religious point of view, of which we see thousands daily guilty, are owing to their ignorance of themselves.—To know myself had been all along my constant study. I weighed myself alone; I balanced myself with others; I watched every means of information, to see how much ground I occupied as a man and as a poet; I studied assiduously Nature's design in my formation—where the lights and shades in my character were intended. I was pretty confident my poems would meet with some applause; but, at the worst, the roar of the Atlantic would deafen the voice of censure, and the novelty of West Indian scenes make me forget neglect. I threw off six hundred copies, of which I had got subscriptions for about three hundred and fifty.—My vanity was highly gratified by the reception I met with from the public; and besides I pocketed, all expenses deducted, nearly twenty pounds. This sum came very seasonably, as I was thinking of indenting myself, for want of money to procure my passage. As soon as I was master of nine guineas, the price of wafting me to the torrid zone, I took a steerage passage in the first ship that was to sail from the Clyde, for

"Hungry ruin had me in the wind."

I had been for some days skulking from covert to covert, under all the terrors of a jail; as some ill-advised people had uncoupled the merciless pack of the law at my heels. I had taken the last farewell of my few friends; my chest was on the road to Greenock; I had composed the last song I should ever measure in Caledonia—"The gloomy night is gathering fast," when a letter from Dr. Blacklock to a friend of mine, overthrew all my schemes, by opening new prospects to my poetic ambition. The doctor belonged to a set of critics for whose applause I had not dared to hope. His opinion, that I would meet with encouragement in Edinburgh for a second edition, fired me so much, that away I posted for that city, without a single acquaintance, or a single letter of introduction. The baneful star that had so long shed its blasting influence in my zenith, for once made a revolution to the nadir; and a kind Providence placed me under the patronage of one of the noblest of men, the Earl of Glencairn. *Oublie moi, grand Dieu, si jamais je l'oublie!*

I need relate no farther. At Edinburgh I was in a new world; I mingled among many classes of men, but all of them

new to me, and I was all attention to "catch" the characters and the "manners living as they rise." Whether I have profited, time will show.

My most respectful compliments to Miss Williams. Her very elegant and friendly letter I cannot answer at present, as my presence is requisite in Edinburgh, and I set out to-morrow.

R. B.

(5.) TO DR. MOORE.

Ellisland, near Dumfries, 4th Jan., 1789.

SIR,

As often as I think of writing to you, which has been three or four times every week these six months, it gives me something so like the idea of an ordinary-sized statue offering at a conversation with the Rhodian colossus, that my mind mis-gives me, and the affair always miscarries somewhere between purpose and resolve. I have, at last, got some business with you, and business letters are written by the style-book. I say my business is with you, Sir, for you never had any with me, except the business that benevolence has in the mansion of poverty.

The character and employment of a poet were formerly my pleasure, but are now my pride. I know that a very great deal of my late eclat was owing to the singularity of my situation, and the honest prejudice of Scotsmen; but still, as I said in the preface to my first edition, I do look upon myself as having some pretensions from Nature to the poetic character. I have not a doubt but the knack, the aptitude, to learn the muses' trade, is a gift bestowed by Him "who forms the secret bias of the soul;"—but I as firmly believe, that *excellence* in the profession is the fruit of industry, labour, attention, and pains. At least I am resolved to try my doctrine by the test of experience. Another appearance from the press I put off to a very distant day, a day that may never arrive—but poesy I am determined to prosecute with all my vigour. Nature has given very few, if any, of the profession the talents of shining in every species of composition. I shall try (for until trial it is impossible to know) whether she has qualified me to shine in any one. The worst of it is, by the time one has finished a piece, it has been so often viewed and reviewed before the mental eye, that one loses, in a good measure, the powers of critical discrimination. Here the best criterion I know is a friend—not only of abilities to judge, but with good-nature enough, like a prudent teacher with a young learner, to praise perhaps a little more than is exactly just, lest the thin-skinned animal fall into that most deplorable of all poetic diseases—heart-breaking despondency of himself. Dare I, Sir, already immensely indebted to your goodness, ask the additional obligation of your being that friend to me? I inclose you an essay of mine in a walk of poesy to me entirely new; I mean the Epistle addressed to R. G., Esq., or Robert Graham of Fintra, Esq., a gentleman of uncommon worth, to whom I lie under very great obligations.

The story of the poem, like most of my poems, is connected with my own story, and to give you the one, I must give you something of the other. I cannot boast of Mr. Creech's ingenuous fair dealing to me. He kept me hanging about Edinburgh from the 7th August, 1787, until the 13th April, 1788, before he would condescend to give me a statement of affairs; nor had I got it even then, but for an angry letter I wrote him, which irritated his pride. "I could" not a "tale" but a detail "unfold," but what am I that should speak against the Lord's anointed Bailie of Edinburgh.

I believe I shall, in whole, £100 copy-right included, clear about £400 some little odds; and even part of this depends upon what the gentleman has yet to settle with me. I give you this information, because you did me the honor to interest yourself much in my welfare. I give you this information, but I give it to yourself only, for I am still much in the gentleman's mercy. Perhaps I injure the man in the idea I am sometimes tempted to have of him—God forbid I should! A little time will try, for in a month I shall go to town to wind up the business if possible.

To give the rest of my story in brief, I have married "my Jean," and taken a farm: with the first step I have every day more and more reason to be satisfied: with the last, it is rather the reverse. I have a younger brother, who supports my aged mother; another still younger brother, and three sisters, in a farm. On my last return from Edinburgh, it cost me about £180 to save them from ruin. Not that I have lost so much—I only interposed between my brother and his impending fate by the loan of so much. I give myself no airs on this, for it was mere selfishness on my part: I was conscious that the wrong scale of the balance was pretty heavily charged, and I thought that throwing a little filial piety and fraternal affection into the scale in my favor, might help to smooth matters at the *grand reckoning*. There is still one thing would make my circumstances quite easy: I have an excise officer's commission, and I live in the midst of a country division. My request to Mr. Graham, who is one of the commissioners of excise, was, if in his power, to procure me that division. If I were very sanguine, I might hope that some of my great patrons might procure me a Treasury warrant for supervisor, surveyor-general, &c.

Thus, secure of a livelihood, "to thee, sweet Poetry, delightful maid," I would consecrate my future days.

R. B.

(6.) TO DR. MOORE.

Ellisland, 23rd March, 1789.

SIR,

THE gentleman who will deliver you this is a Mr. Nielson, a worthy clergyman in my neighbourhood, and a very particular acquaintance of mine. As I have troubled him with this packet, I must turn him over to your goodness, to recompense him for it in a way in which he much needs your

assistance, and where you can effectually serve him:—Mr. Nielson is on his way for France, to wait on his Grace of Queensberry, on some little business of a good deal of importance to him, and he wishes for your instructions respecting the most eligible mode of travelling, &c., for him, when he has crossed the channel. I should not have dared to take this liberty with you, but that I am told, by those who have the honor of your personal acquaintance, that to be a poor honest Scotchman is a letter of recommendation to you, and that to have it in your power to serve such a character, gives you much pleasure.

The inclosed ode is a compliment to the memory of the late Mrs. Oswald, of Auchencruive. You, probably, knew her personally, an honor of which I cannot boast; but I spent my early years in her neighbourhood, and among her servants and tenants. I know that she was detested with the most heartfelt cordiality. However, in the particular part of her conduct which roused my poetic wrath, she was much less blameable. In January last, on my road to Ayrshire, I had put up at Bailie Wigham's, in Sanquhar, the only tolerable inn in the place. The frost was keen, and the grim evening and howling wind were ushering in a night of snow and drift. My horse and I were both much fatigued with the labors of the day, and just as my friend the Bailie and I were bidding defiance to the storm, over a smoking bowl, in wheels the funeral pageantry of the late great Mrs. Oswald; and poor I am forced to brave all the horrors of a tempestuous night, and jade my horse, my young favourite horse, whom I had just christened Pegasus, twelve miles farther on, through the wildest moors and hills of Ayrshire, to New Cumnock, the next inn. The powers of poesy and prose sink under me, when I would describe what I felt. Suffice it to say, that when a good fire at New Cumnock had so far recovered my frozen sinews, I sat down and wrote the inclosed ode.

I was at Edinburgh lately, and settled finally with Mr. Creech; and I must own, that, at last, he has been amicable and fair with me.

R. B.

(7.)

TO DR. MOORE.

Dumfries, Excise-Office, 14th July, 1790.

SIR,

COMING into town this morning to attend my duty in this office, it being collection-day, I met with a gentleman who tells me he is on his way to London; so I take the opportunity of writing to you, as franking is at present under a temporary death. I shall have some snatches of leisure through the day, amid our horrid business and bustle, and I shall improve them as well as I can; but let my letter be as stupid as * * * * *, as miscellaneous as a newspaper, as short as a hungry grace-before-meat, or as long as a law-paper in the Douglas cause; as ill-spelt as country John's billet-doux, or as unsightly a scrawl as Betty Byre-Mucker's answer to it; I hope, considering circumstances, you will forgive it; and as it will put you

to no expense of postage, I shall have the less reflection about it.

I am sadly ungrateful in not returning you my thanks for your most valuable present, "Zeluco." In fact, you are in some degree blameable for my neglect. You were pleased to express a wish for my opinion of the work, which so flattered me, that nothing less would serve my overweening fancy, than a formal criticism on the book. In fact, I have gravely planned a comparative view of you, Fielding, Richardson, and Smollet, in your different qualities and merits as novel-writers. This, I own, betrays my ridiculous vanity, and I may probably never bring the business to bear; but I am fond of the spirit young Elihu shews in the book of Job—"And I said, I will also declare my opinion." I have quite disfigured my copy of the book with my annotations. I never take it up without at the same time taking my pencil and marking with asterisms, parentheses, &c., wherever I meet with an original thought, a nervous remark on life and manners, a remarkably well-turned period, or a character sketched with uncommon precision.

Though I shall hardly think of fairly writing out my "Comparative View," I shall certainly trouble you with my remarks, such as they are.

I have just received from my gentleman that horrid summons in the book of Revelations—"That time shall be no more!"

The little collection of sonnets have some charming poetry in them. If *indeed* I am indebted to the fair author for the book, and not, as I rather suspect, to a celebrated author of the other sex, I should certainly have written to the lady, with my grateful acknowledgments, and my own ideas of the comparative excellence of her pieces. I would do this last, not from any vanity of thinking that my remarks could be of much consequence to Mrs. Smith, but merely from my own feelings as an author, doing as I would be done by.

R. B.

(8.)

TO DR. MOORE.

Ellisland, 28th February, 1791.

I do not know, Sir, whether you are a subscriber to "Grose's Antiquities of Scotland." If you are, the inclosed poem will not be altogether new to you. Captain Grose did me the favor to send me a dozen copies of the proof-sheet, of which this is one. Should you have read the piece before, still this will answer the principal end I have in view: it will give me another opportunity of thanking you for all your goodness to the rustic bard; and also of shewing you, that the abilities you have been pleased to commend and patronize are still employed in the way you wish.

The "Elegy on Captain Henderson," is a tribute to the memory of a man I loved much. Poets have in this the same advantage as Roman Catholics; they can be of service to their friends after they have passed that bourne where all other kindness ceases to be of avail. Whether, after all, either the

one or the other be of any real service to the dead, is, I fear, very problematical; but I am sure they are highly gratifying to the living: and as a very orthodox text, I forget where in Scripture, says, "whatsoever is not of faith, is sin;" so say I, whatsoever is not detrimental to society, and is of positive enjoyment, is of God, the giver of all good things, and ought to be received and enjoyed by his creatures with thankful delight. As almost all my religious tenets originate from my heart, I am wonderfully pleased with the idea, that I can still keep up a tender intercourse with the dearly beloved friend, or still more dearly beloved mistress, who is gone to the world of spirits.

The ballad on Queen Mary was begun while I was busy with "Percy's Reliques of English Poetry." By the way, how much is every honest heart, which has a tincture of Caledonian prejudice, obliged to you for your glorious story of Buchanan and Targe. 'Twas an unequivocal proof of your loyal gallantry of soul, giving Targe the victory. I should have been mortified to the ground if you had not.

I have just read over, once more of many times, your "Zeluco." I marked with my pencil, as I went along, every passage that pleased me particularly above the rest; and one, or two I think, which, with humble deference, I am disposed to think unequal to the merits of the book. I have sometimes thought to transcribe these marked passages, or at least so much of them as to point where they are, and send them to you. Original strokes that strongly depict the human heart, is your and Fielding's province, beyond any other novelist I have ever perused. Richardson indeed might perhaps be excepted; but, unhappily, his *dramatis personæ* are beings of some other world; and however they may captivate the unexperienced, romantic fancy of a boy or a girl, they will ever, in proportion as we have made human nature our study, dissatisfy our ripper years.

As to my private concerns, I am going on, a mighty tax-gatherer before the Lord, and have lately had the interest to get myself ranked on the list of excise as a supervisor. I am not yet employed as such, but in a few years I shall fall into the file of supervisorship by seniority. I have had an immense loss in the death of the Earl of Glencairn; the patron from whom all my fame and good fortune took its rise. Independent of my grateful attachment to him, which was indeed so strong that it pervaded my very soul, and was entwined with the thread of my existence; so soon as the prince's friends had got in (and every dog, you know, has his day), my getting forward in the excise would have been an easier business than otherwise it will be. Though this was a consummation devoutly to be wished, yet, thank Heaven, I can live and rhyme as I am; and as to my boys, poor little fellows! if I cannot place them on as high an elevation in life, as I could wish, I shall, if I am favored so much of the Disposer of events as to see that period, fix them on as broad and independent a basis as possible. Among the many wise adages which have been treasured up by our Scottish ancestors this is one of the best, *Better be the head o' the commonalty, as the tail o' the gentry.*

But I am got on a subject, which however interesting to me, is of no manner of consequence to you; so I shall give

you a short poem on the other page, and close this with assuring you how sincerely I have the honor to be,

Yours, &c.

R. B.

Written on the blank leaf of a book, which I presented to a very young lady, whom I had formerly characterised under the denomination of *The Rose-Bud*. * * * *

(1.) To James Johnson.

Lawn-market, Friday noon, 4th May, 1787.

DEAR SIR,

I HAVE sent you a song never before known, for your collection; the air by M^cGibbon, but I know not the author of the words, as I got it from Dr. Blacklock.

Farewell, my dear Sir! I wished to have seen you, but I have been dreadfully thronged, as I march to-morrow. Had my acquaintance with you been a little older, I would have asked the favour of your correspondence, as I have met with few people whose company and conversation gives me so much pleasure, because I have met with few whose sentiments are so congenial to my own.

When Dunbar and you meet, tell him that I left Edinburgh with the idea of him hanging somewhere about my heart.

Keep the original of the song till we meet again, whenever that may be.

R. B.

(2.) TO JAMES JOHNSON.

Mauchline, 25th [May] 17[88.]

MY DEAR SIR,

I AM really uneasy about that money which Mr. Creech owes me per note in your hand, and I want it much at present, as I am engaging in business pretty deeply both for myself and my brother. A hundred guineas can be but a trifling affair to him, and 'tis a matter of most serious importance to me. To-morrow I begin my operations as a farmer, and God speed the plough!

I am so enamoured with a certain girl's merit, that I have given her a legal title * * * * I found I had a long and much loved fellow-creature's happiness or misery among my hands; and though Pride and seeming Justice were murderous king's advocates on the one side, yet Humanity, Generosity, and Forgiveness, were such powerful, such irresistible counsel on the other side, that a jury of all endearments and attachments brought in an unanimous verdict—*Not Guilty!* And the Panel, be it known unto all whom it may concern, is installed and instated into all the rights, privileges, immunities, and franchises, * * * * that at present do, or in any time coming may, belong to the name, title, designation, &c., of

R. B.

[This letter, we believe, was first printed by Mr. Chambers from original in possession of late Archibald Hastie, Esq., M.P.; and although not strictly literary in its contents, it is interesting for other reasons, and is here inserted to complete the correspondence with Johnson.]

(3.) TO JAMES JOHNSON.

Mauchline, November 15th, 1788.

MY DEAR SIR,

I HAVE sent you two more songs. If you have got any tunes, or anything to correct, please send them by return of the carrier.

I can easily see, my dear friend, that you will very probably have four volumes. Perhaps you may not find your account lucratively in this business; but you are a patriot for the music of your country; and I am certain posterity will look on themselves as highly indebted to your public spirit. Be not in a hurry; let us go on correctly, and your name shall be immortal.

I am preparing a flaming preface for your third volume. I see every day new musical publications advertised; but what are they? Gaudy, hunted butterflies of a day, and then vanish for ever; but your work will outlive the momentary neglects of idle fashion, and defy the teeth of time.

Have you never a fair goddess that leads you a wild-geese chase of amorous devotion? Let me know a few of her qualities, such as whether she be rather black, or fair; plump, or thin; short, or tall, &c.; and choose your air, and I shall task my muse to celebrate her.

R. B.

[This letter was in all respects, both sorrowful and otherwise, a true prophecy.]

(4.) TO JAMES JOHNSON.

Dumfries, 1794.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

YOU should have heard from me long ago; but over and above some vexatious share in the pecuniary losses of these accursed times, I have all this winter been plagued with low spirits and blue devils, so that *I have almost hung my harp on the willow-trees.*

I am just now busy correcting a new edition of my poems, and this, with my ordinary business, finds me in full employment.

I send you by my friend Mr. Wallace forty-one songs for your fifth volume; if we cannot finish it in any other way, what would you think of Scots words to some beautiful Irish airs? In the mean time, at your leisure, give a copy of the Museum to my worthy friend, Mr. Peter Hill, bookseller, to bind for me, interleaved with blank leaves, exactly as he did the Laird of Glenriddel's, that I may insert every anecdote I can learn, together with my own criticisms and remarks on the songs. A copy of this kind I shall leave with you, the editor, to publish at some after period, by way of making the Museum a book famous to the end of time, and you renowned for ever.

I have got an Highland Dirk, for which I have great veneration; as it once was the dirk of *Lord Balmerino*. It fell into bad hands, who stripped it of the silver mounting, as well as the knife and fork. I have some thoughts of sending it to your care, to get it mounted anew.

Thank you for the copies of my Volunteer Ballad.—Our friend Clarke has done *indeed* well! 'tis chaste and beautiful. I have not met with any thing that has pleased me so much. You know I am no connoisseur: but that I am an amateur—will be allowed me.

R. B.

(5.) TO JAMES JOHNSON.

How are you, my dear Friend? and how comes on your fifth volume? You may probably think that for some time past I have neglected you and your work; but, alas! the hand of pain, and sorrow, and care has these many months lain heavy on me! Personal and domestic affliction have almost entirely banished that alacrity and life with which I used to woo the rural Muse of Scotia. In the meantime let us finish what we have so well begun.

The gentleman, Mr. Lewars, a particular friend of mine, will bring out any proofs (if they are ready) or any message you may have. Farewell!

R. BURNS.

Turn over.

You should have had this when Mr. Lewars called on you, but his saddle-bags miscarried. I am extremely anxious for your work, as indeed I am for everything concerning you and your welfare.

You are a good, worthy, honest fellow, and have a good right to live in this world—because you deserve it. Many a merry meeting this Publication has given us, and possibly it may give us more, though, alas! I fear it. This protracting, slow, consuming illness which hangs over me, will, I doubt much, my ever dear friend, arrest my sun before he has well reached his middle career, and will turn over the Poet to far other and more important concerns than studying the brilliancy of wit, or the pathos of sentiment! However, Hope is the cordial of the human heart, and I endeavour to cherish it as well as I can.

Let me hear from you as soon as convenient.—Your work is a great one; and though, now that it is near finished, I see, if we were to begin again, two or three things that might be mended; yet I will venture to prophesy, that to future ages your Publication will be the text-book and standard of Scottish song and music.

I am ashamed to ask another favor of you, because you have been so very good already; but my wife has a very particular friend of hers, a young lady who sings well, to whom she wishes to present the "*Scots Musical Muscum*." If you have a spare copy, will you be [so] obliging as to send it by the very first Fly, as I am anxious to have it soon.

Yours ever,

R. BURNS.

[This letter is now, for the first time, we believe, accurately printed from facsimile of the original in "*Stenhouse's Illustrations*." The hand-writing, although still strong and good, is marked with signs of irritation—slips, and slight errors in orthography. The letter, as the reader will perceive, has two distinct signatures, having been written at two separate times; but has no date of any kind whatever. The presumed date is July, 1796. It is addressed to "Mr. James Johnson, Engraver, Lawn Market, Edinr.," and sealed with the Author's coat of arms. It bore originally on the outside to be delivered by Mr. Lewars; but this, as explained by the letter itself, was impossible. The letter had then been opened, and finished, and despatched by post or carrier. These particulars are

the more interesting, because it is presumably among the last letters written by the Author, either to Johnson, or to any one else. This is one, we have no doubt, among many instances in which the letters of Burns, from careless editorial reproduction, lose one half of their character and their interest. Let the reader compare the above letter as it now stands, with the common edition as it appears in Cunningham, and he will perceive the difference. On Cunningham's authority, we learn that the copy of the "Museum" here applied for was never sent. This is to be much regretted for Johnson's own sake, *if true*, although he was then in very straitened circumstances. For Chambers's edition of letter (4.) see end of Principal Literary Correspondence.]

(1.) To Mr. Thomson.

[Here begins the celebrated Thomson Correspondence, so valuable and interesting in relation to Scottish song and music. Only the titles of songs, or the first lines of quotations will be here given; except where the quotation is important, or not elsewhere to be found in the text. As between Dr. Currie and Mr. Chambers, there is a considerable difference in this correspondence, Mr. Chambers having added many important passages which Dr. Currie at the moment thought proper to omit. The passages thus added by Mr. Chambers from the originals we preserve in brackets. Mr. Thomson's letters to Burns we do not include.]

Dumfries, 16th Sept., 1792.

SIR,

I HAVE just this moment got your letter. As the request you make to me will positively add to my enjoyments in complying with it, I shall enter into your undertaking with all the small portion of abilities I have, strained to their utmost exertion by the impulse of enthusiasm. Only, don't hurry me: "Deil tak the hindmost" is by no means the *cri de guerre* of my muse. Will you, as I am inferior to none of you in enthusiastic attachment to the poetry and music of old Caledonia, and, since you request it, have cheerfully promised my mite of assistance—will you let me have a list of your airs, with the first line of the printed verses you intend for them, that I may have an opportunity of suggesting any alteration that may occur to me? You know 'tis in the way of my trade; still leaving you, gentlemen, the undoubted right of publishers to approve or reject, at your pleasure, for your own Publication. Apropos, if you are for *English* verses, there is, on my part, an end of the matter. Whether in the simplicity of the ballad, or the pathos of the song, I can only hope to please myself in being allowed at least a sprinkling of our native tongue. English verses, particularly the works of Scotsmen, that have merit, are certainly very eligible. "Tweedside;" "Ah! the poor Shepherd's mournful fate;" "Ah! Chloris, could I now but sit," &c., you cannot mend: but such insipid stuff as "To Fanny fair could I impart," &c., usually set to "The Mill mill, O," is a disgrace to the collections in which it has already appeared, and would doubly disgrace a collection that will have the very superior merit of yours. But more of this in the farther prosecution of the business, if I am called on for my strictures and amendments—I say amendments, for I will not alter except where I myself at least think that I amend.

As to any remuneration, you may think my songs either above or below price; for they shall absolutely be the one or the other. In the honest enthusiasm with which I embark in your undertaking, to talk of money, wages, fee, hire, &c.,

would be downright *prostitution of soul*! A proof of each of the songs that I compose or amend, I shall receive as a favor. In the rustic phrase of the season, "Gude speed the wark!"

I am, Sir, Your very humble servant,

R. BURNS.

P.S.—I have some particular reasons for wishing my interference to be known as little as possible.

(2.) TO MR. THOMSON.

MY DEAR SIR,

LET me tell you, that you are too fastidious in your ideas of songs and ballads. I own that your criticisms are just; the songs you specify in your list have, *all but one*, the faults you remark in them; but who shall mend the matter? Who shall rise up and say—"Go to, I will make a better?" For instance, on reading over "The Lea-rig," I immediately set about trying my hand on it, and, after all, I could make nothing more of it than the following, which, Heaven knows, is poor enough.

When o'er the hill the eastern star, &c.

Your observation as to the aptitude of Dr. Percy's ballad to the air, "Nanie O," is just. It is besides, perhaps, the most beautiful ballad in the English language. But let me remark to you, that in the sentiment and style of our Scottish airs, there is a pastoral simplicity, a something that one may call the Doric style and dialect of vocal music, to which a dash of our native tongue and manners is particularly, nay peculiarly, apposite. For this reason, and, upon my honor, for this reason alone, I am of opinion (but, as I told you before, my opinion is yours, freely yours, to approve or reject, as you please) that my ballad of "Nanie O" might perhaps do for one set of verses to the tune. Now don't let it enter into your head that you are under any necessity of taking my verses. I have long ago made up my mind as to my own reputation in the business of authorship, and have nothing to be pleased or offended at, in your adoption or rejection of my verses. Though you should reject one half of what I give you, I shall be pleased with your adopting the other half, and shall continue to serve you with the same assiduity.

In the printed copy of my "Nanie O," the name of the river is horridly prosaic. I will alter it,

Behind yon hills where *Lugar* flows.

Girvan is the name of the river that suits the idea of the stanza best, but Lugar is the most agreeable modulation of syllables.

I will soon give you a great many more remarks on this business; but I have just now an opportunity of conveying you this scrawl, free of postage, an expense that it is ill able to pay: so, with my best compliments to honest Allan, Good be wi' ye, &c.

Friday Night.

Saturday Morning.

As I find I have still an hour to spare this morning before my conveyance goes away, I will give you "Nanie O" at length. [Here follows the song.]

Your remarks on "Ewe-bughts, Marion," are just; still it has obtained a place among our more classical Scottish songs; and what with many beauties in its composition, and more prejudices in its favor, you will not find it easy to supplant it.

In my very early years, when I was thinking of going to the West Indies, I took the following farewell of a dear girl. It is quite trifling, and has nothing of the merits of "Ewe-bughts;" but it will fill up this page. You must know that all my earlier love-songs were the breathings of ardent passion, and though it might have been easy in after-times to have given them a polish, yet that polish, to me, whose they were, and who perhaps alone cared for them, would have defaced the legend of my heart, which was so faithfully inscribed on them. Their uncouth simplicity was, as they say of wines, their *race*.

Will ye go to the Indies, my Mary? &c.

"Galla Water" and "Auld Rob Morris," I think, will most probably be the next subject of my musings. However, even on *my verses*, speak out your criticisms with equal frankness. My wish is, not to stand aloof, the uncomplaining bigot of *opiniâtreté*, but cordially to join issue with you in the furtherance of the work.

R. B.

(3.)

TO MR. THOMSON.

November 8th, 1792.

If you mean, my dear Sir, that all the songs in your collection shall be poetry of the first merit, I am afraid you will find more difficulty in the undertaking than you are aware of. There is a peculiar rhythmus in many of our airs, and a necessity of adapting syllables to the emphasis, or what I would call the feature-notes of the tune, that cramp the poet, and lay him under almost insuperable difficulties. For instance, in the air, "My wife's a wanton wee thing," if a few lines smooth and pretty can be adapted to it, it is all you can expect. The following were made extempore to it; and though, on further study, I might give you something more profound, yet it might not suit the light-horse gallop of the air so well as this random clink:—

MY WIFE'S A WINSOME WEE THING.

I have just been looking over the "Collier's bonny Dochter;" and, if the following rhapsody, which I composed the other day, on a charming Ayrshire girl, Miss Lesley Baillie, as she passed through this place to England, will suit your taste better than the "Collier Lassie," fall on and welcome.

O, saw ye bonie Lesley, &c.

I have hitherto deferred the sublimer, more pathetic airs, until more leisure, as they will take, and deserve, a greater effort. However, they are all put into your hands, as clay into the hands of the potter, to make one vessel to honour, and another to dishonour. Farewell, &c.,

R. B.

(4.)

TO MR. THOMSON.

[SONG.]

Ye banks, and braes, and streams around
The castle o' Montgomery, &c.

14th November, 1792.

MY DEAR SIR,

I AGREE with you that the song "Katharine Ogie," is very poor stuff, and unworthy, altogether unworthy of so beautiful an air. I tried to mend it; but the awkward sound, *Ogie*, recurring so often in the rhyme, spoils every attempt at introducing sentiment into the piece. The foregoing song pleases myself; I think it is in my happiest manner; you will see at first glance that it suits the air. The subject of the song is one of the most interesting passages of my youthful days, and I own that I should be much flattered to see the verses set to an air which would insure celebrity. Perhaps, after all, 'tis the still glowing prejudice of my heart that throws a borrowed lustre over the merits of the composition.

I have partly taken your idea of "Auld Rob Morris." I have adopted the two first verses, and am going on with the song on a new plan, which promises pretty well. I take up one or another, just as the bee of the moment buzzes in my bonnet-lug; and do you, *sans cérémonie*, make what use you chuse of the productions.

Adieu, &c.

R. B.

(5.)

TO MR. THOMSON.

Dumfries, 1st Dec., 1792.

YOUR alterations of my "Nanie O" are perfectly right. So are those of "My wife's a winsome wee thing." Your alteration of the second stanza is a positive improvement.* Now, my dear Sir, with the freedom which characterises our correspondence, I must not, cannot alter "Bonnie Leslie." You are right; the word "Alexander" makes the line a little uncouth, but I think the thought is pretty. Of Alexander, beyond all other heroes, it may be said, in the sublime language of Scripture, that "he went forth conquering and to conquer."

"For nature made her *what she is*,
And never made anither." (such a person as she is.)

This is, in my opinion, more poetical than "Ne'er made sic anither." However, it is immaterial: make it either way. "Caledonie," I agree with you, is not so good a word as could be wished, though it is sanctioned in three or four instances by Allan Ramsay; but I cannot help it. In short, that species of stanza is the most difficult that I have ever tried.

The "Lea-rig" is as follows:

[The song is here given at full length.]

I am interrupted.

Yours, &c.,

R. B.

*[The second stanza as Thomson proposed to write it would have been

O leeze me on my wee thing,
My bonny blithesome wee thing;
Sae lang's I hae my wee thing,
I'll think my lot divine, &c.

See Posthumous Poetical Works, p. 327, with Note on Song.]

(6.) TO MR. THOMSON.

[SONGS.]

There's auld Rob Morris, &c.

Duncan Gray cam here to woo, &c.

4th December, 1792.

THE foregoing I submit, my dear Sir, to your better judgment. Acquit them, or condemn them, as seemeth good in your sight. "Duncan Gray" is that kind of light-horse gallop of an air, which precludes sentiment. The ludicrous is its ruling feature.

R. B.

(7.) TO MR. THOMSON.

[SONGS.]

O Poortith cauld, and restless love, &c.

There's braw, braw lads on Yarrow braes, &c.

Jan. 1793.

MANY returns of the season to you, my dear Sir. How comes on your Publication?—will these two foregoing be of any service to you? I should like to know what songs you print to each tune, besides the verses to which it is set. In short, I would wish to give you my opinion on all the poetry you publish. You know it is my trade; and a man in the way of his trade may suggest useful hints, that escape men of much superior parts and endowments in other things.

If you meet with my dear, and much-valued Cunningham, greet him, in my name, with the compliments of the season.

Yours, &c.

R. B.

(8.)

TO MR. THOMSON.

26th January, 1793.

I APPROVE greatly, my dear Sir, of your plans. Dr. Beattie's essay will, of itself, be a treasure. On my part, I mean to draw up an appendix to the Doctor's essay, containing my stock of anecdotes, &c., of our Scots songs. All the late Mr. Tytler's anecdotes I have by me, taken down in the course of my acquaintance with him, from his own mouth. I am such an enthusiast, that in the course of my several peregrinations through Scotland, I made a pilgrimage to the individual spot from which every song took its rise, "Lochaber" and the "Braes of Ballenden" excepted. So far as the locality, either from the title of the air, or the tenor of the song, could be ascertained, I have paid my devotions at the particular shrine of every Scots muse.

I do not doubt but you might make a very valuable collection of Jacobite songs; but would it give no offence? In the meantime, do not you think that some of them, particularly "The Sow's tail to Geordie," as an air, with other words, might be well worth a place in your collection of lively songs?

If it were possible to procure songs of merit, it would be proper to have one set of Scots words to every air, and that the set of words to which the notes ought to be set. There is a *naïveté*, a pastoral simplicity, in a slight intermixture of Scots words and phraseology, which is more in unison (at least to my taste, and, I will add, to every genuine Caledonian taste) with the simple pathos, or rustic sprightliness of our native music, than any English verses whatever.

The very name of Peter Pindar is an acquisition to your work. His "Gregory" is beautiful. I have tried to give you a set of stanzas in Scots, on the same subject, which are at your service. Not that I intend to enter the lists with Peter: that would be presumption indeed. My song, though much inferior in poetic merit, has, I think, more of the ballad simplicity in it.

O mirk, mirk is this midnight hour, &c.

My most respectful compliments to the honourable gentleman* who favoured me with a postscript in your last. He shall hear from me and receive his MSS. soon.

R. B.

* [Hon. A. Erskine.]

(9.)

TO MR. THOMSON.

[SONG.]

O Mary, at thy window be, &c.

20th March, 1793.

MY DEAR SIR,

THE song prefixed is one of my juvenile works. I leave it in your hands. I do not think it very remarkable, either for its merits or demerits. It is impossible (at least I feel it so in my stunted powers) to be always original, entertaining, and witty.

What is become of the list, &c., of your songs? I shall be out of all temper with you by and by. I have always looked on myself as the prince of indolent correspondents, and valued myself accordingly; and I will not, cannot, bear rivalry from you, nor any body else.

R. B.

(10.) TO MR. THOMSON.

March, 1793.

[SONG.]

Here awa, there awa, wandering Willie, &c.

I LEAVE it to you, my dear Sir, to determine whether the above, or the old "Thro' the lang muir" be the best.

R. B.

(11.) TO MR. THOMSON.

OPEN THE DOOR TO ME, OH!

With Alterations.

Oh open the door, some pity to shew,

Oh, open the door to me, Oh,* &c.

I do not know whether this song be really mended.

R. B.

* [The second line was originally

If love it may na be, Oh.]

(12.) TO MR. THOMSON.

JESSIE.

Tune.—"Bonie Dundee."

TRUE-HEARTED was he, the sad swain o' the Yarrow,
And fair are the maids on the banks o' the Ayr, &c.

(13.) TO MR. THOMSON.

WHÉN WILD WAR'S DEADLY BLAST WAS BLAWN.

Air.—"The Mill mill, O."

When wild war's deadly blast was blawn,
And gentle peace returning, &c.

MEG O' THE MILL.

Air.—"O Bonie Lass will you lie in a Barrack?"

O ken ye what Meg o' the Mill has gotten? &c.

(14.)

TO MR. THOMSON.

7th April, 1793.

THANK you, my dear Sir, for your packet. You cannot imagine how much this business of composing for your Publication has added to my enjoyments. What with my early attachment to ballads, your book, &c., ballad-making is now as completely my hobby-horse as ever fortification was Uncle Toby's; so I'll e'en canter it away till I come to the limit of my race—God grant that I may take the right side of the winning post!—and then cheerfully looking back on the honest folks with whom I have been happy, I shall say or sing, "Sae merry as we a' hae been," and, raising my last looks to the whole human race, the last words of the voice of "Coila" shall be "Good night, and joy be wi' you a'!" So much for my last words: now for a few present remarks, as they have occurred at random, on looking over your list.

The first lines of "The last time I came o'er the moor," and several other lines in it, are beautiful; but, in my opinion—pardon me! revered shade of Ramsay!—the song is unworthy of the divine air. I shall try to *make* or *mend*.

"For ever Fortune wilt thou prove" is a charming song; but "Logan burn and Logan braes" are sweetly susceptible of rural imagery: I'll try that likewise, and if I succeed, the other song may class among the English ones. I remember the two last lines of a verse in some of the old songs of "Logan Water" (for I know a good many different ones) which I think pretty:

"Now my dear lad maun face his faes,
Far, far frae me and Logan Braes."

"My Patie is a lover gay," is unequal. "His mind is never muddy," is a muddy expression indeed.

"Then I'll resign and marry Pate,
And syne my cockernony—"

This is surely far unworthy of Ramsay or your book. My song "Rigs of barley," to the same tune, does not altogether please me; but if I can mend it, and thresh a few loose sentiments out of it, I will submit it to your consideration. "The lass o' Patie's mill" is one of Ramsay's best songs; but there is one loose sentiment in it, which my much-valued friend Mr. Erskine will take into his critical consideration. In Sir J. Sinclair's Statistical volumes, are two claims—one, I think from Aberdeenshire, and the other from Ayrshire—for the honour of this song. The following anecdote, which I had from the present Sir William Cunningham of Robertland, who had it of the late John, Earl of Loudon, I can, on such authorities, believe:—

Allan Ramsay was residing at Loudon Castle with the then Earl, father to Earl John; and one forenoon, riding, or walking out together, his lordship and Allan passed a sweet romantic spot on Irwine water, still called "Patie's Mill," where a bonie lass was "tedding hay, bareheaded on the green." My lord observed to Allan, that it would be a fine theme for a song. Ramsay took the hint, and, lingering behind, he composed the first sketch of it, which he produced at dinner.

"One day I heard Mary say," is a fine song; but, for consistency's sake alter the name "Adonis." Were there ever

such banns published, as a purpose of marriage between Adonis and Mary? I agree with you that my song, "There's nought but care on every hand," is much superior to "Poortith cauld." The original song, "The Mill mill, O!" though excellent, is, on account of delicacy, inadmissible; still I like the title, and think a Scottish song would suit the notes best; and let your chosen song, which is very pretty, follow as an English set. "The Banks of the Dee" is, you know, literally "Langlee," to slow time. The song is well enough, but has some false imagery in it: for instance,

"And sweetly the nightingale sung from the tree."

In the first place, the nightingale sings in a low bush, but never from a tree; and in the second place, there never was a nightingale seen or heard on the banks of Dee, or on the banks of any other river in Scotland. Exotic rural imagery is always comparatively flat. If I could hit on another stanza equal to "The small birds rejoice," &c., I do myself honestly avow, that I think it a superior song. "John Anderson, my jo"—the song to this tune in Johnson's Museum is my composition, and I think it not my worst: if it suit you, take it, and welcome. Your collection of sentimental and pathetic songs is, in my opinion, very compleat; but not so your comic ones. Where are "Tullochgorum," "Lumps o' puddin'," "Tibbie Fowler," and several others, which, in my humble judgment, are well worthy of preservation? There is also one sentimental song of mine in the Museum, which never was known out of the immediate neighbourhood, until I got it taken down from a country girl's singing. It is called "Craigieburn Wood," and, in the opinion of Mr. Clarke, is one of our sweetest Scottish songs. He is quite an enthusiast about it; and I would take his taste in Scottish music against the taste of most connoisseurs.

You are quite right in inserting the last five in your list, though they are certainly Irish. "Shepherds, I have lost my love;" is to me a heavenly air—what would you think of a set of Scottish verses to it? I have made one to it, a good while ago, which I think * * *, but in its original state is not quite a lady's song. I inclose an altered, not amended copy for you, if you chuse to set the tune to it, and let the Irish verses follow.*

Mr. Erskine's songs are all pretty, but his "Lone Vale" is divine.

Yours, &c.

R. B.

Let me know just how you like these random hints.

*[Song above referred to is probably "Yestreen I got a pint o' wine." &c.]

(15.) TO MR. THOMSON.

April, 1793.

I HAVE yours, my dear Sir, this moment. I shall answer it and your former letter, in my desultory way of saying whatever comes uppermost.

The business of many of our tunes wanting, at the beginning, what fiddlers call a starting-note, is often a rub to us poor rhymers.

"There's braw, braw lads on Yarrow braes,
That wander through the blooming heather,"

you may alter to

Braw, braw lads on Yarrow braes,
Ye wander, &c.

My song, "Here awa, there awa," as amended by Mr. Erskine, I entirely approve of, and return you.*

Give me leave to criticise your taste in the only thing in which it is, in my opinion, reprehensible. You know I ought to know something of my own trade. Of pathos, sentiment, and point, you are a complete judge; but there is a quality more necessary than either in a song, and which is the very essence of a ballad—I mean simplicity: now, if I mistake not, this last feature you are a little apt to sacrifice to the foregoing.

Ramsay, as every other poet, has not been always equally happy in his pieces; still I cannot approve of taking such liberties with an author as Mr. W[alker] proposes doing with "The last time I came o'er the moor." Let a poet, if he chuses, take up the idea of another, and work it into a piece of his own; but to mangle the works of the poor bard whose tuneful tongue is now mute for ever in the dark and narrow house—by Heaven, 'twould be sacrilege! I grant that Mr. W.'s version is an improvement: but I know Mr. W. well, and esteem him much; let him mend the song, as the Highlander mended his gun—he gave it a new stock, a new lock, and a new barrel.

I do not, by this, object to leaving out improper stanzas, where that can be done without spoiling the whole. One stanza in "The lass o' Patie's mill" must be left out: the song will be nothing worse for it. I am not sure if we can take the same liberty with "Corn rigs are bonnie." Perhaps it might want the last stanza, and be the better for it. "Cauld kail in Aberdeen," you must leave with me yet awhile. I have vowed to have a song to that air, on the lady whom I attempted to celebrate in the verses, "Poortith cauld and restless love." At any rate, my other song, "Green grow the rushes," will never suit. That song is current in Scotland under the old title, and to the merry old tune of that name, which, of course would mar the progress of your song to celebrity. Your book will be the standard of Scots songs for the future; let this idea ever keep your judgment on the alarm.

I send a song on a celebrated toast in this country, to suit "Bonie Dundee." I send you also a ballad to the "Mill mill, O!"

"The last time I came o'er the moor," I would fain attempt to make a Scots song for, and let Ramsay's be the English set. You shall hear from me soon. When you go to London on this business, can you come by Dumfries? I have still several MS. Scots airs by me, which I have pickt up, mostly from the singing of country lasses. They please me vastly; but your learned *lugs* would perhaps be displeased

with the very feature for which I like them. I call them simple; you would pronounce them silly. Do you know a fine air called "Jackie Hume's Lament?" I have a song of considerable merit to that air. I'll inclose you both the song and the tune, as I had them ready to send to Johnson's Museum.† I send you likewise, to me, a beautiful little air, which I have taken down from *viva voce*.‡

Adieu.

R. B.

*[This is more complaisant than correct. Our Author did indeed adopt one or two of the changes suggested—but was very far from accepting them all. It is astonishing, indeed, considering the value and importance of his contributions, how he should have endured so much interference so patiently. But there was a limit to that patience. Compare note to letter (17).]

+["O ken ye what Meg o' the Mill has gotten?" &c.]

‡["There was a lass, and she was fair," &c.]

(16.) TO MR. THOMSON.

April, 1793.

[SONG.]

Farewell thou stream that winding flows, &c.

MY DEAR SIR,

I HAD scarcely put my last letter into the post-office, when I took up the subject of "The last time I came o'er the moor," and ere I slept drew the outlines of the foregoing. How far I have succeeded, I leave on this, as on every other occasion, to you to decide. I own my vanity is flattered, when you give my songs a place in your elegant and superb work; but to be of service to the work is my first wish. As I have often told you, I do not in a single instance wish you, out of compliment to me, to insert anything of mine. One hint let me give you—whatever Mr. Pleyel does, let him not alter one *iota* of the original Scottish airs; I mean in the song department; but let our national music preserve its native features. They are, I own, frequently wild and irreducible to the more modern rules; but on that very eccentricity, perhaps, depends a great part of their effect.

R. B.

(17.) TO MR. THOMSON.

June, 1793.

WHEN I tell you, my dear Sir, that a friend of mine, in whom I am much interested, has fallen a sacrifice to these accursed times, you will easily allow that it might unhinge me for doing any good among ballads. My own loss as to pecuniary matters is trifling; but the total ruin of a much-loved friend is a loss indeed. Pardon my seeming inattention to your last commands.

I cannot alter the disputed lines in the "Mill mill, O!" What you think a defect, I esteem as a positive beauty; so you see how doctors differ.* I shall now, with as much alacrity as I can muster, go on with your commands.

You know Frazer, the haut-boy player in Edinburgh—he is here, instructing a band of music for a fencible corps quartered in this country. Among many of his airs that please me, there is one, well known as a reel, by the name of "The Quaker's wife;" and which, I remember, a grand-aunt of mine used to sing, by the name of "Tiggeram Cosh, my bonnie wee lass." Mr. Frazer plays it slow, and with an expression that quite charms me. I became such an enthusiast about it, that I made a song for it, which I here subjoin, and inclose Frazer's set of the tune. If they hit your fancy, they are at your service; if not, return me the tune, and I will put it in Johnson's Museum. I think the song is not in my worst manner.

Blythe hae I been on yon hill, &c.

I should wish to hear how this pleases you.

R. B.

*[It is manifest that our Author was at last offended by the editorial liberties so often taken with his contributions. Notwithstanding the hint thus plainly conveyed, Messrs. Thomson and Erskine had the confidence to make the forbidden alteration—a liberty which the Poet, as we are informed by his widow, silently resented. See Note on the Song.]

(18.) TO MR. THOMSON.

June 25th, 1793.

HAVE you ever, my dear Sir, felt your bosom ready to burst with indignation, on reading of those mighty villains who divide kingdoms, desolate provinces, and lay nations waste, out of the wantonness of ambition, or often from still more ignoble passions? In a mood of this kind to-day I recollected the air of "Logan Water," and it occurred to me that its querulous melody probably had its origin from the plaintive indignation of some swelling, suffering heart, fired at the tyrannic strides of some public destroyer, and overwhelmed with private distress, the consequence of a country's ruin. If I have done anything at all like justice to my feelings, the following song, composed in three-quarters of an hour's meditation in my elbow-chair, ought to have some merit.

O Logan, sweetly didst thou glide, &c.

Do you know the following beautiful little fragment, in Witherspoon's collection of Scots songs?

Air—"Hughie Graham."

"Oh gin my love were yon red rose,
That grows upon the castle wa';
And I mysel' a drap o' dew,
Into her bonie breast to fa'!
"Oh there, beyond expression blest,
I'd feast on beauty a' the night,
Seal'd on her silk-saft faulds to rest,
Till fley'd awa by Phœbus' light."

This thought is inexpressibly beautiful; and quite, so far as I know, original. It is too short for a song, else I would

forswear you altogether, unless you gave it a place. I have often tried to eke a stanza to it, but in vain. After balancing myself for a musing five minutes, on the hind-legs of my elbow-chair, I produced the following.

The verses are far inferior to the foregoing, I frankly confess: but if worthy of insertion at all, they might be first in place; as every poet who knows anything of his trade, will husband his best thoughts for a concluding stroke.

Oh were my love yon lilac fair,
Wi' purple blossoms to the spring;
And I a bird to shelter there,
When wearied on my little wing:
How I wad mourn, when it was torn
By autumn wild and winter rude!
But I wad sing on wanton wing,
When youthfu' May its bloom renew'd.

R. B.

(19.) TO MR. THOMSON.

July 2nd, 1793.

MY DEAR SIR,

I HAVE just finished the following ballad, and, as I do think it in my best style, I send it you. Mr. Clarke, who wrote down the air from Mrs. Burns's wood-note wild, is very fond of it, and has given it a celebrity by teaching it to some young ladies of the first fashion here. If you do not like the air enough to give it a place in your collection, please return it. The song you may keep, as I remember it.

There was a lass, and she was fair, &c.

I have some thoughts of inserting in your index, or in my notes, the names of the fair ones, the themes of my songs. I do not mean the name at full; but dashes or asterisms, so as ingenuity may find them out.

[The heroine of the foregoing is Miss M'Murdo, daughter to Mr. M'Murdo, of Drumlanrig, one of your subscribers. I have not painted her in the rank which she holds in life, but in the dress and character of a cottager.]

R. B.

[This sentence does not appear in the original letter.—*Chambers.*]

(20.) TO MR. THOMSON.

July, 1793.

I ASSURE you, my dear Sir, that you truly hurt me with your pecuniary parcel. It degrades me in my own eyes. However, to return it would savour of affectation; but, as to any more traffic of that debtor and creditor kind, I swear by that HONOUR which crowns the upright statue of ROBERT BURNS'S INTEGRITY—on the least motion of it, I will indignantly spurn the bypast transaction, and from that moment commence entire stranger to you! BURNS'S character for generosity of sentiment and independence of mind, will, I trust, long outlive any of his wants which the cold unfeeling ore can supply: at least, I will take care that such a character he shall deserve.

Thank you for my copy of your Publication. Never did my eyes behold in any musical work such elegance and correctness. Your preface, too, is admirably written, only your partiality to me has made you say too much: however, it will bind me down to double every effort in the future progress of the work. The following are a few remarks on the songs in the list you sent me. I never copy what I write to you, so I may often be tautological, or perhaps contradictory.

"The Flowers of the Forest" is charming as a poem, and should be, and must be, set to the notes; but, though out of your rule, the three stanzas beginning

"I've seen the smiling o' fortune beguiling,"

are worthy of a place, were it but to immortalise the author of them, who is an old lady of my acquaintance, and at this moment living in Edinburgh. She is a Mrs. Cockburn, I forget of what place; but from Roxburghshire. What a charming apostrophe is

"Oh flekle fortune, why this cruel sporting,
Why thus perplex us—poor sons of a day!"

The old ballad, "I wish I were where Helen lies," is silly to contemptibility. My alteration of it, in Johnson's, is not much better. Mr. Pinkerton, in his, what he calls, ancient ballads (many of them notorious, though beautiful enough, forgeries), has the best set. It is full of his own interpolations—but no matter.

In my next I will suggest to your consideration a few songs which may have escaped your hurried notice. In the meantime, allow me to congratulate you now, as a brother of the quill. You have committed your character and fame, which will now be tried, for ages to come, by the illustrious jury of the SONS AND DAUGHTERS OF TASTE—all whom poesy can please, or music charm.

Being a bard of nature, I have some pretensions to second sight; and I am warranted by the spirit to foretell and affirm, that your great-grand-child will hold up your volumes, and say, with honest pride, "This so much admired selection was the work of my ancestor."

R. B.

* [The family of the illustrious novelist Charles Dickens occupy this relationship.]

(21.) TO MR. THOMSON.

August, 1793.

MY DEAR THOMSON,

I HOLD the pen for our friend Clarke, who at present is studying the music of the spheres at my elbow. The *Georgium Sidus* he thinks is rather out of tune; so, until he rectify that matter, he cannot stoop to terrestrial affairs.

He sends you six of the *Rondeau* subjects, and if more are wanted, he says you shall have them.

* * * * *

Confound* your long stairs!

S. CLARKE.

* [So in Currie: in manuscript a stronger word. The signature 'S. Clarke' is in Clarke's hand.—*Chambers.*]

(22.) TO MR. THOMSON.

August, 1793.

YOUR objection, my dear Sir, to the passages in my song of "Logan Water," is right in one instance; but it is difficult to mend it; if I can, I will. The other passage you object to does not appear in the same light to me.

I have tried my hand on "Robin Adair," and, you will probably think, with little success; but it is such a cursed, cramp, out-of-the-way measure, that I despair of doing any thing better to it.

While larks with little wing, &c.

So much for namby-pamby. I may, after all, try my hand on it in Scots verse. There I always find myself most at home.

I have just put the last hand to the song I meant for "Cauld Kail in Aberdeen." If it suits you to insert it, I shall be pleased, as the heroine is a favorite of mine; if not, I shall also be pleased: because I wish, and will be glad, to see you act decidedly on the business.* 'Tis a tribute to a man of taste, and as an editor, which you owe yourself.

R. B.

*[The song herewith sent is that in p. 29 of this [iv.] volume.—Currie. The song on that page is "O Poortith cauld."]

(23.) TO MR. THOMSON.

August, 1793.

THAT crinkum-crankum tune, "Robin Adair," has run so in my head, and I succeeded so ill in my last attempt, that I have ventured, in this morning's walk, one essay more. You, my dear Sir, will remember an unfortunate part of our worthy friend C[unningham]'s story, which happened about three years ago. That struck my fancy, and I endeavoured to do the idea justice as follows:

Had I a cave on some wild distant shore, &c.

By the way, I have met with a musical Highlander in Breadalbane's Fencibles, which are quartered here, who assures me that he well remembers his mother's singing Gaelic songs to both "Robin Adair" and "Gramachree." They certainly have more of the Scotch than Irish taste in them.

This man comes from the vicinity of Inverness; so it could not be any intercourse with Ireland that could bring them; except, what I shrewdly suspect to be the case, the wandering minstrels, harpers, and pipers, used to go frequently errant through the wilds both of Scotland and Ireland, and so some favourite airs might be common to both. A case in point—They have lately, in Ireland, published an Irish air, as they say, called "Caun du delish." The fact is, in a publication of Corri's, a great while ago, you will find the same air, called a Highland one, with a Gaelic song set to it. Its name there, I think, is "Oran Gaoil," and a fine air it is. Do ask honest Allan, or the Rev. Gaelic Parson, about these matters.

R. B.

(24.) TO MR. THOMSON.

August, 1793.

MY DEAR SIR,

"LET me in this ae night" I will reconsider. I am glad that you are pleased with my song, "Had I a cave," &c., as I liked it myself.

I walked out yesterday evening with a volume of the Museum in my hand, when, turning up "Allan Water," "What numbers shall the muse repeat," &c., as the words appeared to me rather unworthy of so fine an air, and recollecting that it is on your list, I sat and raved under the shade of an old thorn, till I wrote one to suit the measure. I may be wrong; but I think it not in my worst style. You must know, that in Ramsay's Tea-table, where the modern song first appeared, the ancient name of the tune, Allan says, is "Allan Water," or "My love Annie's very bonie." This last has certainly been a line of the original song; so I took up the idea, and, as you will see, have introduced the line in its place, which I presume it formerly occupied; though I likewise give you a chusing line, if it should not hit the cut of your fancy:

By Allan stream I chanced to rove, &c.

Bravo! say I; it is a good song. Should you think so too (not else) you can set the music to it, and let the other follow as English verses.

Autumn is my propitious season. I make more verses in it than all the year else. God bless you!

R. B.

(25.) TO MR. THOMSON.

August, 1793.

YOU may readily trust, my dear Sir, that any exertion in my power is heartily at your service. But one thing I must hint to you; the very name of Peter Pindar is of great service to your Publication, so get a verse from him now and then; though I have no objection, as well as I can, to bear the burden of the business.*

Is "Whistle, and I'll come to you, my lad," one of your airs? I admire it much; and yesterday I set the following verses to it. Urbani, whom I have met with here, begged them of me, as he admires the air much; but as I understand that he looks with rather an evil eye on your work, I did not chuse to comply. However, if the song does not suit your taste I may possibly send it him. [He is, *entre nous*, a narrow, contracted creature; but he sings so delightfully, that whatever he introduces at your concert must have immediate celebrity.] The set of the air which I had in my eye is in Johnson's Museum.

O whistle, and I'll come to you, my lad, &c.

Another favorite air of mine is, "The muckin' o' Geordie's byre." When sung slow with expression, I have wished that it had had better poetry; that I have endeavoured to supply as follows:

Adown winding Nith I did wander, &c.

Mr. Clarke begs you to give Miss Phillis a corner in your book, as she is a particular flame of his, and out of compliment to him I have made the song. She is a Miss P[hillis] M'[Murdo], sister to "Bonie Jean." They are both pupils of his. You shall hear from me, the very first grist I get from my rhyming-mill.

R. B.

* [Dr. Currie has transferred this paragraph from the present, its proper place, to the head of a subsequent Letter.—*Chambers.*]

(26.) TO MR. THOMSON.

[28th] August, 1793.

THAT tune, "Cauld kail," is such a favorite of yours, that I once more roved out yesterday, for a gloamin-shot at the muses; when the muse that presides o'er the shores of Nith, or rather my old inspiring dearest nymph, Coila, whispered me the following. I have two reasons for thinking that it was my early, sweet, simple inspirer that was by my elbow, "smooth gliding without step," and pouring the song on my glowing fancy. In the first place, since I left Coila's native haunts, not a fragment of a poet has arisen to cheer her solitary musings, by catching inspiration from her, so I more than suspect that she has followed me hither, or, at least, makes me occasional visits; secondly, the last stanza of this song I send you is the very words that Coila taught me many years ago, and which I set to an old Scots reel in Johnson's Museum.

Come, let me take thee to my breast, &c.

If you think the above will suit your idea of your favorite air, I shall be highly pleased. "The last time I came o'er the moor" I cannot meddle with, as to mending it; and the musical world have been so long accustomed to Ramsay's words, that a different song, though positively superior, would not be so well received. I am not fond of choruses to songs, so I have not made one for the foregoing.

R. B.

(27.) TO MR. THOMSON.

[28th] August, 1793.

[My dear Sir, I have written you already by to-day's post, where I hinted at a song of mine which might suit "Dainty Davie." I have been looking over another and a better song of mine in the Museum, which I have altered as follows, and which I am persuaded will please you. The words 'Dainty Davie' glide so sweetly in the air, that, to a Scots ear, any song to it, without Davie being the hero, would have a lame effect.]

[SONG.]

Now rosy May comes in wi' flowers, &c.

So much for Davie. The chorus, you know, is to the low part of the tune. See Clarke's set of it in the Museum.

N. B. In the Museum they have drawled out the tune to twelve lines of poetry, which is — nonsense. Four lines of song, and four of chorus, is the way.

(28.) TO MR. THOMSON.

Sept., 1793.

You know that my pretensions to musical taste are merely a few of nature's instincts, untaught and untutored by art. For this reason, many musical compositions, particularly where much of the merit lies in counterpoint, however they may transport and ravish the ears of you connoisseurs, affect my simple lug no otherwise than merely as melodious din. On the other hand, by way of amends, I am delighted with many little melodies, which the learned musician despises as silly and insipid. I do not know whether the old air "Hey tuttie, taitie," may rank among this number; but well I know that, with Frazer's hautboy, it has often filled my eyes with tears. There is a tradition, which I have met with in many places of Scotland, that it was Robert Bruce's march at the battle of Bannockburn. This thought, in yesternight's evening walk* warmed me to a pitch of enthusiasm on the theme of liberty and independence, which I threw into a kind of Scottish ode, fitted to the air, that one might suppose to be the gallant Royal Scot's address to his heroic followers on that eventful morning.

Bruce to his Troops on the Eve of the Battle of
BANNOCKBURN.

TO ITS AIN TUNE.

Scots, wha hae wi' Wallace bled, &c.†

So may God ever defend the cause of truth and liberty, as he did that day! Amen.

P.S. I showed the air to Urbani, who was highly pleased with it, and begged me to make soft verses for it; but I had no idea of giving myself any trouble on the subject, till the accidental recollection of that glorious struggle for freedom, associated with the glowing ideas of some other struggles of the same nature, not quite so ancient, roused my rhyming mania. Clarke's set of the tune, with his bass, you will find in the Museum, though I am afraid that the air is not what will entitle it to a place in your elegant selection.

R. B.

* [Currie prints this passage "This thought in my solitary wanderings warmed me," &c., in which Mr. Chambers convicts his distinguished predecessor of an improper liberty with the text. See Notes on Song: Poetical Works, p. 293, &c.]
† [See Author's own version, Poetical Works, p. 213.]

(29.) TO MR. THOMSON.

[Sept., 1793.]

I DARE say, my dear Sir, that you will begin to think my correspondence is persecution. No matter, I can't help it; a ballad is my hobby-horse, which, though otherwise a simple sort of harmless idiotical beast enough, has yet this blessed headstrong property, that when it has once fairly made off with a hapless wight, it gets so enamoured with the tinkle-gingle, tinkle-gingle of its own bells, that it is sure to run poor pilgarlick, the bedlam jockey, quite beyond any useful point or post in the common race of man.

The following song I have composed for "Oran-gaoil," the Highland air that, you tell me in your last, you have resolved to give a place to in your book. I have this moment finished the song, so you have it glowing from the mint. If it suit you, well!—if not, 'tis also well!

Behold the hour, the boat arrive, &c.

R. B.

(30.) TO MR. THOMSON.

Sept., 1793.

I HAVE received your list, my dear Sir, and here go my observations on it.

"Down the burn, Davie." I have this moment tried an alteration, leaving out the last half of the third stanza, and the first half of the last stanza, thus:

As down the burn they took their way,
And thro' the flowery dale;
His cheek to hers he aft did lay,
And love was ay the tale.
With "Mary, when shall we return,
Sic pleasure to renew?"
Quoth Mary, "Love, I like the burn,
And ay shall follow you."

"Thro' the wood, Laddie"—I am decidedly of opinion that both in this, and "There'll never be peace till Jamie comes hame," the second or high part of the tune being a repetition of the first part an octave higher, is only for instrumental music, and would be much better omitted in singing.

["Banks of the Dee"—Leave it out entirely—'tis rank Irish—every other Irish air you have adopted is in the Scotch taste; but "Langoole"—why, 'tis no more like a Scots air than Lunardi's balloon is like Diogenes's tub. But why don't you take also the "Humours of Glen," "Captain O'Kean," "Coolin," and many other Irish airs, much more beautiful than it? In place of this blackguard Irish jig, let me recommend to you our beautiful Scots air "Saw ye my Peggy"—a tune worth ten thousand of it; or "Fy! let us a' to the Bridal," worth twenty thousand of it.

"White Cockade"—I have forgot the Cantata you allude to, as I kept no copy, and indeed did not know that it was in existence; however, I remember that none of the songs pleased myself, except the last—something about

Courts for cowards were erected,
Churches built to please the priest.

But there is another song of mine, a composition of early life, in the Museum, beginning—

Nae gentle dames, though e'er sae fair,

which suits the measure, and has tolerable merit.]

"Cowden-knowes"—Remember in your index that the song in pure English to this tune, beginning

"When summer comes, the swains on Tweed,"

is the production of Crawford. Robert was his christian name.

["Bonnie Dundee"—Your objection of the stiff line is just; but mending my colouring would spoil my likeness; so the picture must stand as it is.*

"Flowers of the Forest"—The verses, "I've seen the smiling," &c., with a few trifling alterations, putting "no more" for "nae mair," and the word "turbid" in a note at the bottom of your page, to shew the meaning of "drumlie," the song will serve you for an English set. A small sprinkling of Scotticisms is no objection to an English reader.]

"Laddie, lie near me," must lie by me for some time. I do not know the air; and until I am complete master of a tune, in my own singing (such as it is) I can never compose for it. My way is: I consider the poetic sentiment correspondent to my idea of the musical expression; then chuse my theme; begin one stanza: when that is composed, which is generally the most difficult part of the business, I walk out, sit down now and then, look out for objects in nature around me that are in unison or harmony with the cogitations of my fancy, and workings of my bosom; humming every now and then the air with the verses I have framed. When I feel my muse beginning to jade, I retire to the solitary fire-side of my study, and there commit my effusions to paper; swinging at intervals on the hind-legs of my elbow-chair, by way of calling forth my own critical strictures, as my pen goes on. Seriously, this, at home, is almost invariably my way.

What cursed egotism!

"Gill Morice" I am for leaving out. It is a plaguy length; the air itself is never sung; and its place can well be supplied by one or two songs for fine airs that are not in your list—for instance "Craigieburn-wood" and "Roy's wife." The first, beside its intrinsic merit, has novelty, and the last has high merit as well as great celebrity. I have the original words of a song for the last air, in the handwriting of the lady who composed it; and they are superior to any edition of the song which the public has yet seen.

"Highland-laddie." The old set will please a mere Scotch ear best; and the new an Italianised one. There is a third, and what Oswald calls the old "Highland-laddie," which pleases me more than either of them. It is sometimes called "Ginglin Johnnie;" it being the air of an old humorous tawdry song of that name. You will find it in the Museum, "I hae been at Crookieden," &c. I would advise you, in this musical quandary, to offer up your prayers to the muses for inspiring direction; and in the meantime, waiting for this direction, bestow a libation to Bacchus; and there is not a doubt but you will hit on a judicious choice. *Probatum est.*

"Auld Sir Simon" I must beg you to leave out, and put in its place "The Quaker's wife."

"Blythe hae I been o'er the hill" is one of the finest songs ever I made in my life, and, besides, is composed on a young lady, positively the most beautiful, lovely woman in the world. As I purpose giving you the names and designations of all my heroines, to appear in some future edition of your work, perhaps half a century hence, you must certainly include "The boniest lass in a' the world," in your collection.

"Dainty Davie" I have heard sung nineteen thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine times, and always with the chorus to the low part of the tune; and nothing has surprised me so much as your opinion on this subject. If it will not suit as I proposed, we will lay two of the stanzas together, and then make the chorus follow [exactly as "Lucky Nancy" in the Museum].

"Fee him, father"—I enclose you Frazer's set of this tune when he plays it slow: in fact he makes it the language of despair. I shall here give you two stanzas, in that style, merely to try if it will be any improvement. Were it possible, in singing, to give it half the pathos which Frazer gives it in playing, it would make an admirably pathetic song. I do not give these verses for any merit they have. I composed them at the time in which "Patie Allan's mither died—that was about the back o' midnight," and by the lee-side of a bowl of punch, which had overset every mortal in company except the hautbois and the muse.

Thou hast left me ever, Jamie, &c.

"Jockie and Jenny" I would discard, and in its place would put "There's nae luck about the House," which has a very pleasant air, and which is positively the finest love-ballad in that style in the Scottish or perhaps in any other language. "When she cam ben she bobbit," as an air, is more beautiful than either, and in the *andante* way would unite with a charming sentimental ballad.

"Saw ye my father?" is one of my greatest favorites. The evening before last, I wandered out, and began a tender song, in what I think is its native style. I must premise that the old way, and the way to give most effect, is to have no starting note, as the fiddlers call it, but to burst at once into the pathos. Every country girl sings "Saw ye my father?" &c.

My song is but just begun; and I should like, before I proceed, to know your opinion of it. I have sprinkled it with the Scottish dialect, but it may be easily turned into correct English.†

"Todlin hame." Urbani mentioned an idea of his, which has long been mine, that this air is highly susceptible of pathos; accordingly, you will soon hear him at your concert try it to a song of mine in the Museum, "Ye banks and braes o' bonnie Doon." [Clarke has told me what a creature he is; but if he will bring any more of our tunes from darkness into light, I would be pleased.] One song more and I have done; "Auld lang syne." The air is but mediocre; but the following song, the old song of the olden times, and which has never been in print, nor even in manuscript, until I took it down from an old man's singing, is enough to recommend any-air.

Should auld acquaintance be forgot? &c.

Now, I suppose, I have tired your patience fairly. You must, after all is over, have a number of ballads, properly so called. "Gill Morice," "Tranent Muir," "Macpherson's Farewell," "Battle of Sheriff-muir," or "We ran, and they ran" (I know the author of this charming ballad, and his history), "Hardiknute," "Barbara Allan" (I can furnish a finer set of this tune than any that has yet appeared); and besides, do you know that I really have the old tune to which "The Cherry and the Slae" was sung, and which is mentioned as a well-known air in "Scotland's Complaint," a book published before poor Mary's days? It was then called "The banks o' Helicon;" an old poem which Pinkerton has brought to light. You will see all this in Tytler's History of Scottish music. The tune, to a learned ear, may have no great merit; but it is a great curiosity. I have a good many original things of this kind.

R. B.

* [See Letter (12), JESSIE.]

+ [Where are the joys I hae met in the morning? &c.]

(31.)

TO MR. THOMSON.

[8th] September, 1793.

I AM happy, my dear Sir, that my ode pleases you so much. Your idea, "honor's bed," is, though a beautiful, a hackneyed idea; so, if you please, we will let the line stand as it is. I have altered the song as follows:—

BANNOCKBURN.

ROBERT BRUCE'S ADDRESS TO HIS ARMY.

Scots, wha hae wi' Wallace bled, &c.*

N.B.—I have borrowed the last stanza from the common stall edition of Wallace—

"A false usurper sinks in every foe,
And liberty returns with every blow."

A couplet worthy of Homer. Yesterday you had enough of my correspondence. The post goes, and my head aches miserably. One comfort! I suffer so much, just now, in this world, for last night's joviality, that I shall escape scot-free for it in the world to come. Amen!

R. B.

* [See Second Version, Poetical Works, p. 213.]

(32.)

TO MR. THOMSON.

[15th] September, 1793.

"WHO shall decide when doctors disagree?" My ode pleases me so much that I cannot alter it. Your proposed alterations would, in my opinion, make it tame. I am exceedingly obliged to you for putting me on reconsidering it, as I think I have much improved it. Instead of "sodger! hero!" I will have it "Caledonian, on wi' me."

I have scrutinized it over and over; and to the world, some way or other, it shall go as it is. At the same time, it will not in the least hurt me, should you leave it out altogether, and adhere to your first intention of adopting Logan's verses.

I have finished my song to "Saw ye my father?" and in English as you will see. That there is a syllable too much for the expression of the air, is true; but, allow me to say, that the mere dividing of a dotted crotchet into a crotchet and a quaver, is not a great matter: however, in that I have no pretensions to cope in judgment with you. Of the poetry I speak with confidence; but the music is a business where I hint my ideas with the utmost diffidence.

The old verses have merit, though unequal, and are popular: my advice is to set the air to the old words, and let mine follow as English verses. Here they are:

Where are the joys I have met in the morning? &c.

Adieu, my dear Sir! the post goes, so I shall defer some other remarks until more leisure.

R. B.

(33.) TO MR. THOMSON.

September, 1793.

I HAVE been turning over some volumes of songs, to find verses whose measures would suit the airs for which you have allotted me English songs.

For "Muirland Willie," you have, in Ramsay's Tea-Table, an excellent song beginning, "Ah, why those tears in Nelly's eyes?" As for "The Collier's Dochter," take the following old bacchanal:—

Deluded swain, the pleasure, &c.

The faulty line in Logan-Water, I mend thus:

How can your flinty hearts enjoy
The widow's tears, the orphan's cry?

The song otherwise will pass. As to "M'Gregoir-a-Rura," you will see a song of mine to it, with a set of the air superior to yours, in the Museum, vol. ii. p. 181. The song begins,

Raving winds around her blowing.

Your Irish airs are pretty, but they are downright Irish. If they were like the "Banks of Banna," for instance, though really Irish, yet in the Scottish taste, you might adopt them. Since you are so fond of Irish music, what say you to twenty-five of them in an additional number? We could easily find this quantity of charming airs, I will take care that you shall not want songs; and I assure you that you will find it the most saleable of the whole. If you do not approve of "Roy's wife," for the music's sake, we shall not insert it. "Deil tak the wars" is a charming song; so is "Saw ye my Peggy?" "There's nae luck about the House" well deserves a place. I cannot say that "O'er the hills and far awa" strikes me as equal to your selection. "This is no my ain House" is a great favorite of mine; and if you will send me your set of

it, I will task my muse to her highest effort. What is your opinion of "I hae laid a herrin' in saut?" I like it much. Your jacobite airs are pretty, and there are many others of the same kind pretty; but you have not room for them. You cannot, I think, insert "Fy! let us a' to the bridal," to any other words than its own.

What pleases me, as simple and *naïve*, disgusts you as ludicrous and low. For this reason, "Fy! gie me my coggie, Sirs," "Fy! let us a' to the bridal," with several others of that cast, are to me highly pleasing; while "Saw ye my father, or saw ye my mother!" delights me with its descriptive simple pathos. Thus my song, "Ken ye what Meg o' the mill has gotten?" pleases myself so much, that I cannot try my hand at another song to the air, so I shall not attempt it. I know you will laugh at all this; but "ilka man wears his belt his ain gait."

R. B.

(34.) TO MR. THOMSON.

October, 1793.

YOUR last letter, my dear Thomson, was indeed laden with heavy news. Alas, poor Erskine!* The recollection that he was a coadjutor in your Publication has till now scared me from writing to you, or turning my thoughts on composing for you.

I am pleased that you are reconciled to the air of the "Quaker's wife;" though, by the bye, an old Highland gentleman, and a deep antiquarian, tells me it is a Gaelic air, and known by the name of "Leiger m' chose." The following verses, I hope, will please you, as an English song to the air.

Thine am I, my faithful fair, &c.

Your objection to the English song I proposed for "John Anderson my jo," is certainly just. The following is by an old acquaintance of mine, and I think has merit. The song was never in print, which I think is so much in your favor. The more original good poetry your collection contains, it certainly has so much the more merit.

SONG.—BY GAVIN TURNBULL.

O condescend, dear charming maid,
My wretched state to view;
A tender swain to love betray'd,
And sad despair, hy you.

While here, all melancholy,
My passion I deplore,
Yet, urg'd by stern, resistless fate,
I love thee more and more.

I heard of love, and with disdain
The urchin's power denied;
I laugh'd at every lover's pain,
And mock'd them when they sigh'd.

But how my state is alter'd!
Those happy days are o'er;
For all thy unrelenting hate,
I love thee more and more.

O yield, illustrious beauty, yield!
No longer let me mourn;
And tho' victorious in the field,
Thy captive do not scorn.

Let generous pity warm thee,
My wonted peace restore;
And grateful I shall bless thee still,
And love thee more and more.

The following address of Turnbull's to the Nightingale will suit as an English song to the air "There was a lass, and she was fair." By the bye, Turnbull has a great many songs in MS., which I can command, if you like his manner. Possibly, as he is an old friend of mine, I may be prejudiced in his favor; but I like some of his pieces very much.

THE NIGHTINGALE.

By G. TURNBULL.

Thou sweetest minstrel of the grove,
That ever tried the plaintive strain,
Awake thy tender tale of love,
And soothe a poor forsaken swain.

For tho' the muses deign to aid,
And teach him smoothly to complain;
Yet Delia, charming, cruel maid,
Is deaf to her forsaken swain.

All day, with fashion's gaudy sons,
In sport, she wanders o'er the plain:
Their tales approves, and still she shuns
The notes of her forsaken swain.

When evening shades obscure the sky,
And bring the solemn hours again,
Begin, sweet bird, thy melody,
And soothe a poor forsaken swain.

I shall just transcribe another of Turnbull's, which would go charmingly to "Lewie Gordon."

LAURA.

By G. TURNBULL.

Let me wander where I will,
By shady wood, or winding rill;
Where the sweetest May-born flowers
Paint the meadows, deck the bowers;
Where the linnet's early song
Echoes sweet the woods among:
Let me wander where I will,
Laura haunts my fancy still.

If at rosy dawn I chuse
To indulge the smiling muse;
If I court some cool retreat,
To avoid the noontide heat;
If beneath the moon's pale ray,
Thro' unfrequented wilds I stray:
Let me wander where I will,
Laura haunts my fancy still.

When at night the drowsy god
Waves his sleep-compelling rod,
And to fancy's wakeful eyes
Bids celestial visions rise;
While with boundless joy I rove
Thro' the fairy land of love:
Let me wander where I will,
Laura haunts my fancy still.

The rest of your letter I shall answer at some other opportunity.

R. B.

* [The Honourable A. Erskine, brother to Lord Kelly, whose melancholy death Mr. Thomson had communicated in an excellent letter, which he has suppressed. —*Currie*. Mr. Erskine was found drowned in the Firth of Forth, with his pockets full of stones. The distressing event was believed to have been the consequence of a habit of gambling. —*Chambers*.]

(35.)

TO MR. THOMSON.

December, 1793.

TELL me how you like the following verses to the tune of
"Jo Janet."

Husband, husband cease your strife, &c.

[Then follows]

Air—"The Sutor's Dochter."

Wilt thou be my dearie, &c.

(36.)

TO MR. THOMSON.

May, 1794.

MY DEAR SIR,

I RETURN you the plates, with which I am highly pleased; I would humbly propose, instead of the younker knitting stockings, to put a stock and horn into his hands. A friend of mine, who is positively the ablest judge on the subject I have ever met with, and though an unknown, is yet a superior artist with the burin, is quite charmed with Allan's manner. I got him a peep of the "Gentle Shepherd;" and he pronounces Allan a most original artist of great excellence.

For my part, I look on Mr. Allan's chusing my favorite poem for his subject, to be one of the highest compliments I have ever received.

I am quite vexed at Pleyel's being cooped up in Franco, as it will put an entire stop to our work. Now, and for six or seven months, *I shall be quite in song*, as you shall see by and by. I got an air, pretty enough, composed by Lady Elizabeth Heron of Heron, which she calls "The Banks of Cree." Cree is a beautiful romantic stream, and as her ladyship is a particular friend of mine, I have written the following song to it.

Here is the glen, and here the bower, &c.

[The air, I fear, is not worth your while; else I would send it you. I am hurried, so farewell until next post. My seal is all well, except that my holly must be a *bush*, not a *tree*, as in the present shield. I also inclose it, and will send the pebble by the first opportunity.]

R. B.

(37.)

TO MR. THOMSON.

July, 1794.

Is there no news yet of Pleyel? Or is your work to be at a dead stop until the allies set our modern Orpheus at liberty from the savage thralldom of democratic discords? Alas the day! And woe is me! That auspicious period, pregnant with the happiness of millions * * * seems by no means near.

I have presented a copy of your songs to the daughter of a much-valued and much-honored friend of mine, Mr. Graham of Fintray. I wrote on the blank side of the title-page the following address to the young lady.

Here, where the Scottish muse immortal lives, &c.

R. B.

[This letter contains an ironical tirade on the mishaps of Prussia in her war against France, which Dr. Currie had deemed unfit for publication.—*Chambers.*]

(38.) TO MR. THOMSON.

30th August, 1794.

THE last evening, as I was straying out, and thinking of "O'er the hills and far away," I spun the following stanza for it; but whether my spinning will deserve to be laid up in store, like the precious thread of the silk-worm, or brushed to the devil, like the vile manufacture of the spider, I leave, my dear Sir, to your usual candid criticism. I was pleased with several lines in it at first, but I own that now it appears rather a flimsy business.

This is just a hasty sketch, until I see whether it be worth a critique. We have many sailor songs, but as far as I at present recollect, they are mostly the effusions of the jovial sailor, not the wailings of his love-lorn mistress. I must here make one sweet exception—"Sweet Annie frae the sea-beach came." Now for the song:—

ON THE SEAS AND FAR AWAY.

How can my poor heart be glad, &c.

I give you leave to abuse this song, but do it in the spirit of Christian meekness.

R. B.

(39.) TO MR. THOMSON.

Sept., 1794.

[LITTLE do the Trustees for our Manufactures, when they frank my letters to you, little do they consider what kind of manufacture they are encouraging. The Manufacture of Nonsense was certainly not in idea when the act of Parliament was framed, and yet, under my hands and your cover, it thrives amazingly. Well, there are more pernicious manufactures, that is certain.]

I shall withdraw my "On the seas and far away" altogether: it is unequal and unworthy the work. Making a poem is like begetting a son: you cannot know whether you have a wise man or a fool, until you produce him to the world and try him.

For that reason I send you the offspring of my brain, abortions and all; and, as such, pray look over them, and forgive them, and burn them. I am flattered at your adopting

"Ca' the yowes to the knowes," as it was owing to me that ever it saw the light. About seven years ago I was well acquainted with a worthy little fellow of a clergyman, a Mr. Clunzie, who sang it charmingly; and, at my request, Mr. Clarke took it down from his singing. When I gave it to Johnson, I added some stanzas to the song, and mended others, but still it will not do for you. In a solitary stroll which I took to-day, I tried my hand on a few pastoral lines, following up the idea of the chorus, which I would preserve. Here it is, with all its crudities and imperfections on its head.

Ca' the yowes to the knowes, &c.

I shall give you my opinion of your other newly adopted songs my first scribbling fit.

R. B.

(40.) TO MR. THOMSON.

Sept., 1794.

Do you know a blackguard Irish song called "Onagh's Waterfall?" The air is charming, and I have often regretted the want of decent verses to it. It is too much, at least for my humble rustic Muse, to expect that every effort of hers shall have merit; still I think that it is better to have mediocre verses to a favorite air, than none at all. On this principle I have all along proceeded in the Scots Musical Museum; and as that publication is at its last volume, I intend the following song, to the air above mentioned, for that work.

If it does not suit you as an editor, you may be pleased to have verses to it that you can sing in the company of ladies.

Sae flaxen were her ringlets, &c.

Not to compare small things with great, my taste in music is like the mighty Frederick of Prussia's taste in painting: we are told that he frequently admired what the connoisseurs decried, and always, without any hypocrisy, confessed his admiration. I am sensible that my taste in music must be inelegant and vulgar, because people of undisputed and cultivated taste can find no merit in my favorite tunes. Still, because I am cheaply pleased, is that any reason why I should deny myself that pleasure? Many of our strathspeys, ancient and modern, give me most exquisite enjoyment, where you and other judges would probably be shewing disgust. For instance, I am just now making verses for "Rothemurche's rant," an air which puts me in raptures; and, in fact, unless I can be pleased with the tune, I never can make verses to it. Here I have Clarke on my side; who is a judge that I will pit against any of you. "Rothemurche," he says, "is an air both original and beautiful;" and, on his recommendation, I have taken the first part of the tune for a chorus, and the fourth or last part for the song. I am but two stanzas deep in the work, and possibly you may think, and justly, that the poetry is as little worth your attention

as the music. [Here follow two stanzas of "Lassie wi' the lint-white locks."]

I have begun anew, "Let me in this ae night." Do you think that we ought to retain the old chorus? I think we must retain both the old chorus and the first stanza of the old song. I do not altogether like the third line of the first stanza, but cannot alter it to please myself. I am just three stanzas deep in it. Would you have the *denouement* to be successful or otherwise?—should she "let him in" or not?

Did you not once propose "The Sow's tail to Geordie" as an air for your work? I am quite delighted with it; but I acknowledge that is no mark of its real excellence. I once set about verses for it, which I meant to be in the alternate way of a lover and his mistress chanting together. I have not the pleasure of knowing Mrs. Thomson's christian name, and yours, I am afraid, is rather burlesque for sentiment, else I had meant to have made you [two] the hero and heroine of the little piece.

How do you like the following epigram which I wrote the other day on a lovely young girl's recovery from a fever? Doctor Maxwell was the physician who seemingly saved her from the grave; and to him I address the following:—

TO DR. MAXWELL,
ON MISS JESSIE STAIG'S RECOVERY.

Maxwell, if merit here you crave,
That merit I deny;
You save fair Jessie from the grave!—
An angel could not die.

God grant you patience with this stupid epistle!

R. B.

(41.) TO MR. THOMSON.

19th October, 1794.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

By this morning's post I have your list, and, in general, I highly approve of it. I shall, at more leisure, give you a critique on the whole. [In the meantime, let me offer at a new improvement, or rather restoring old simplicity, in one of your newly adopted songs:—

When she cam ben she bobbit—a crotchet stop
When she cam ben she bobbit—a crotchet stop
And when she cam ben she kiss'd Cockpen,
And syne she denied that she did it—a crotchet stop.

This is the old rhythm, and by far the most original and beautiful. Let the harmony of the bass, at the stops, be full; and thin and dropping through the rest of the air, and you will give the tune a noble and striking effect. Perhaps I am betraying my ignorance; but Mr. Clarke is decidedly of my opinion. He] goes to your town by to-day's fly, and I wish you would call on him and take his opinion in general: you know his taste is a standard. He will return here again in a week or two, so please do not miss asking for him. One

thing I hope he will do [which would give me high satisfaction], persuade you to adopt my favorite "Craigieburn-wood" in your selection: it is as great a favorite of his as of mine. The lady on whom it was made is one of the finest women in Scotland; and in fact (*entre nous*) is in a manner to me what Sterne's Eliza was to him—a mistress, or friend, or what you will, in the guileless simplicity of Platonic love. (Now, don't put any of your squinting constructions on this, or have any clishmaclavier about it among our acquaintances.) I assure you that to my lovely friend you are indebted for many of your best songs of mine. Do you think that the sober, gin-horse routine of existence could inspire a man with life, and love, and joy—could fire him with enthusiasm, or melt him with pathos, equal to the genius of your book? No! no! Whenever I want to be more than ordinary *in song*—to be in some degree equal to your diviner airs—do you imagine I fast and pray for the celestial emanation? *Tout au contraire!* I have a glorious recipe; the very one that for his own use was invented by the divinity of healing and poetry, when erst he piped to the flocks of Admetus. I put myself in a regimen of admiring a fine woman; and in proportion to the adorability of her charms, in proportion you are delighted with my verses. The lightning of her eye is the godhead of Parnassus, and the witchery of her smile the divinity of Helicon!

To descend to business; if you like my idea of "When she cam ben she bobbit," the following stanzas of mine, altered a little from what they were formerly, when set to another air, may perhaps do instead of worse stanzas:—

O saw ye my dear, my Phely, &c.

Now for a few miscellaneous remarks. "The Posie" (in the Museum) is my composition; the air was taken down from Mrs. Burns's voice. It is well known in the West Country, but the old words are trash. By the bye, take a look at the tune again, and tell me if you do not think it is the original from which "Roslin Castle" is composed. The second part in particular, for the first two or three bars, is exactly the old air. "Strathallan's Lament" is mine; the music is by our right trusty and deservedly well-beloved Allan Masterton. "Donocht-Head" is not mine; I would give ten pounds it were. It appeared first in the *Edinburgh Herald*, and came to the editor of that paper with the Newcastle post-mark on it.* "Whistle o'er the lave o't" is mine; the music said to be by a John Bruce, a celebrated violin player in Dumfries, about the beginning of this century. This I know, Bruce, who was an honest man, though a red-wud Highlandman, constantly claimed it; and by all the old musical people here is believed to be the author of it.

"O how can I be blythe and glad" is mine; but as it is already appropriated to an air by itself, both in the Museum and from thence into Ritson—I have got that book—I think it would be as well to leave it out.

"M'Pherson's Farewell" is mine, excepting the chorus and one stanza.

"Andrew and his cutty gun."—The song to which this is set in the Museum is mine, and was composed on Miss

Euphemia Murray, of Lintrose, commonly and deservedly called the Flower of Strathmore.

["The Quaker's wife."—Do not give the tune that name, but the old Highland one, "Leiger m' chose." The only fragment remaining of the old words is the chorus, still a favorite lullaby of my old mother, from whom I learned it:

Leiger m' chose, my bonny wee lass,
An' leiger m' chose, my dearie:
A' the lee-lang winter night,
Leiger m' chose, my dearie.

The current name for the reel to this day at country weddings is "Iaggeram Cosh," a Lowland corruption of the original Gaelic. I have altered the first stanza, which I would have to stand thus:

Thine am I, my faithful fair,
Well thou may'st discover;
Every pulse along my veins
Tells the ardent lover.

"Saw ye my father."—I am still decidedly of opinion that you should set the tune to the old song, and let mine follow for English verses; but as you please. "In summer when the hay was mawn," "An' O for ane-and-twenty, Tam," are both mine. The set of the last in the Museum does not please me; but if you will get any of our ancients Scots fiddlers to play you in our strathspey time "The Moudiewort"—that is the name of the air—I think it will delight you.]

"How long and dreary is the night!" I met with some such words in a collection of songs somewhere, which I altered and enlarged; and to please you, and to suit your favorite air, I have taken a stride or two across my room and have arranged it anew, as you will find on the other page.

How lang and dreary is the night, &c.

Tell me how you like this. I differ from your idea of the expression of the tune. There is, to me, a great deal of tenderness in it. You cannot, in my opinion, dispense with a bass to your addenda airs. A lady of my acquaintance, a noted performer, plays ["Nae Luck about the House"] and sings [it] at the same time so charmingly, that I shall never bear to see any of her songs sent into the world, as naked as Mr. What-d'ye-call-um has done in his London Collection.†

These English songs gravel me to death. I have not that command of the language that I have of my native tongue. [In fact, I think my ideas are more barren in English than in Scotch.] I have been at "Duncan Gray," to dress it in English, but all I can do is deplorably stupid. For instance:—

Let not woman e'er complain, &c.

[If you insert both Peter's song and mine, to the "Bonny Brucket Lassie," it will cost you engraving the first verse of both songs, as the rhythm of the two is considerably different. As "Fair Eliza" is already published, I am totally indifferent whether you give it a place or not; but to my taste, the rhythm of my song to that air would have a much more original effect.

"Love never more shall give me Pain" has long been appropriated to a popular air of the same title, for which reason, in my opinion, it would be improper to set it to "My Lodging is on the cold Ground." There is a song in the Museum by a *ci-devant* goddess of mine, which I think not unworthy of the air, and suits the rhythm equally with "Love never more," &c. It begins—

"Talk not of love, it gives me pain."]

Since the above, I have been out in the country, taking a dinner with a friend, where I met with the lady whom I mentioned in the second page in this odds-and-ends of a letter. As usual, I got into song; and returning home I composed the following:

Sleep'st thou, or wak'st thou, fairest creature, &c.

[I allow the first four lines of each stanza to be repeated; but if you inspect the air, in the first part, you will find that it also, without a quaver of difference, is the same passages repeated; which will exactly put it on the footing of our other slow Scottish airs, as they, you know, are twice sung over.]

If you honor my verses by setting the air to them, I will vamp up the old song, and make it English enough to be understood.

[I have sent you my song noted down to the air, in the way I think it should go: I believe you will find my set of the air to be one of the best.]

I inclose you a musical curiosity, an East Indian air, which you would swear was a Scottish one. I know the authenticity of it, as the gentleman who brought it over is a particular acquaintance of mine. Do preserve me the copy I send you, as it is the only one I have. Clarke has set a bass to it, and I intend putting it into the Musical Museum. Here follow the verses I intend for it.

But lately seen in gladsome green, &c.

I would be obliged to you if you would procure me a sight of Ritson's collection of English songs, which you mention in your letter. I will thank you for another information, and that as speedily as you please: whether this miserable drawling hotchpotch epistle has not completely tired you of my correspondence?

R. B.

*[The reader will be curious to see this poem, so highly praised by Burns. Here it is.

KEEN blows the wind o'er Donoeht-Head,
The snaw drives snelly thro' the dale,
The Gaber-lunzie tirls my sneek,
And shivering tells his waefu' tale.
"Cauld is the night, O let me in,
"And dinna let your minstrel fa',
"And dinna let his winding sheet
"Be naething but a wreath o' snaw.

"Full ninety winters hae I seen,
"And pip'd where gor-cocks whirring flew,
"And mony a day I've danc'd, I ween,
"To lilt which from my drone I blew."
My Eppie wak'd, and soon she cry'd,
"Get up guidman, and let him in;
"For weel ye ken the winter night
"Was short when he began his din."

My Eppie's voice, O wow it's sweet,
 Even tho' she bans and scaulds a wee;
 But when it's tun'd to sorrow's tale,
 O, haith, it's doubly dear to me!
 Come in, auld earl, I'll steer my fire,
 I'll make it bleeze a bonnie flame;
 Your bluid is thin, ye've tint the gate,
 Ye should na stray sae far frae hame.

"Nae hame hae I," the minstrel said,
 "Sad party-strife o'erturned my ha';
 "And, weeping at the eve of life,
 "I wander thro' a wreath o' snaw."
 * * * * *

This affecting poem is apparently incomplete. The author need not be ashamed to own himself. It is worthy of Burns, or of Macneill.—*Currie*. It was written by a gentleman of Newcastle, named Pickering.—*Chambers*.] Donnocht Head is a mountain promontory in extreme north of Scotland.

+ [Mr. Ritson.—*Currie*.]

(42.) TO MR. THOMSON.

November, 1794.

MANY thanks to you, my dear Sir, for your present; it is a book of the utmost importance to me. I have yesterday begun my anecdotes, &c., for your work. I intend drawing them up in the form of a letter to you, which will save me from the tedious dull business of systematic arrangement. Indeed, as all I have to say consists of unconnected remarks, anecdotes, scraps of old songs, &c., it would be impossible to give the work a beginning, a middle, and an end, which the critics insist to be absolutely necessary in a work. [As soon as I have a few pages in order, I will send you them as a specimen. I only fear that the matter will grow so large among my hands as to be more expense than you can allot for it. Now for my desultory way of writing to you.

I am happy that I have at last pleased you with verses to your right-hand tune "Cauld Kail." I see a little unlikeness in the line you object to, but cannot alter it for a better. It is one thing to know one's error, and another and much more difficult affair to amend that error.] In my last, I told you my objections to the song you had selected for "My lodging is on the cold ground." On my visit the other day to my fair Chloris (that is the poetic name of the lovely goddess of my inspiration) she suggested an idea, which I, on my return from the visit, wrought into the following song. [It is exactly in the measure of "My dearie an thou die," which you say is the precise rhythm of the air:]

My Chloris, mark how green the groves, &c.

How do you like the simplicity and tenderness of this pastoral? I think it pretty well.

I like you for entering so candidly and so kindly into the story of "*Ma chere Amie*." I assure you I was never more in earnest in my life, than in the account of that affair which I sent you in my last. Conjugal love is a passion which I deeply feel, and highly venerate; but, somehow, it does not make such a figure in poesy as that other species of the passion,

"Where Love is liberty, and Nature law."

Musically speaking, the first is an instrument of which the gamut is scanty and confined, but the tones inexpressibly sweet, while the last has powers equal to all the intellectual modulations of the human soul. Still, I am a very poet in my enthusiasm of the passion. The welfare and happiness of the beloved object is the first and inviolate sentiment that pervades my soul; and whatever pleasures I might wish for, or whatever might be the raptures they would give me, yet, if they interfere [and clash] with that first principle, it is having these pleasures at a dishonest price; and justice forbids, and generosity disdains the purchase. * * * [Where the parties are capable of, and the Passion is, the true Divinity of Love—the man who can act otherwise is a VILLAIN!]

[The Poet, as Mr. Chambers informs us, here leaves a small space at the bottom of a page, and at the top of the next goes on: 'It was impossible, you know, to take up the subject of your songs in the last sheet: that would have been a falling off indeed!']

Despairing of my own powers to give you variety enough in English songs, I have been turning over old collections, to pick out songs, of which the measure is something similar to what I want; and, with a little alteration, so as to suit the rhythm of the air exactly, to give you them for your work. Where the songs have hitherto been but little noticed, nor have ever been set to music, I think the shift a fair one. A song, which, under the same first verse, you will find in Ramsay's Tea-Table Miscellany, I have cut down for an English dress to your "Dainty Davie," as follows:—

It was the charming month of May, &c.

You may think meanly of this, but take a look at the bombast original, and you will be surprised that I have made so much of it. I have finished my song to "Rothemurche's rant," and you have Clarke to consult as to the set of the air for singing.

Lassie wi' the lint-white locks, &c.

This piece has at least the merit of being a regular pastoral; the vernal morn, the summer noon, the autumnal evening, and the winter night, are regularly rounded. If you like it, well; if not, I will insert it in the Museum.

I am out of temper that you should set so sweet, so tender an air, as "Deil tak the wars," to the foolish old verses. You talk of the silliness of "Saw ye my father?"—By heavens! the odds is gold to brass! Besides, the old song, though now pretty well modernized into the Scottish language, is originally, and in the early editions, a bungling low imitation of the Scottish manner, by that genius Tom D'Urfey, so has no pretensions to be a Scottish production. There is a pretty English song by Sheridan, in the "*Duenna*," to this air, which is out of sight superior to D'Urfey's. It begins,

"When sable night each drooping plant restoring."

The air, if I understand the expression of it properly, is the very native language of simplicity, tenderness, and love. I have again gone over my song to the tune, as follows.

Sleep'st thou, or wak'st thou, fairest creature? * &c.

* N

[I could easily throw this into an English mould; but to my taste, in the simple and tender of the pastoral song, a sprinkling of the old Scottish has an inimitable effect. You know I never encroach on your privilege as an Editor. You may reject my song altogether, and keep by the old one; or you may give mine as a second Scottish one; or lastly, you may set the air to my verses, still giving the old song, as a second one, and as being well known; in which last case, I would find you in English verses of my own, a song, the exact rhythm of my Scottish one. If you keep by the old words, Sheridan's song will do for an English one. I once more conjure you to have no manner of false delicacy in accepting or refusing my compositions, either in this or any other of your songs.]

Now for my English song to "Nancy's to the green-wood," &c.

Farewell thou stream that winding flows, &c.

["Young Jockey was the blithest lad."—My English song, "Here is the Glen, and here the Bower," cannot go to this air. However, the measure is so common that you may have your choice of five hundred English songs. Do you know the air "Lumps of Pudding?" It is a favorite of mine, and I think would be worth a place among your additional songs, as soon as several on your list. It is in a measure in which you will find songs enow to chuse from; but if you were to adopt it, I would take it in my own hand.]

There is an air, "The Caledonian Hunt's delight," to which I wrote a song that you will find in Johnson, "Ye banks and braes o' bonie Doon:" this air I think might find a place among your hundred, as Lear says of his knights. [To make room for it, you may take out—to my taste—either "Young Jockey was the blithest lad," or "There's nae Luck about the House," or "The Collier's Bonny Lassie," or "The tither morn," or "The Sow's Tail;" and put into your additional list. Not but that these songs have great merit; but still they have not the pathos of "The Banks of Doon."] Do you know the history of the air? It is curious enough. A good many years ago, Mr. James Miller, writer in your good town, a gentleman whom possibly you know, was in company with our friend Clarke; and talking of Scottish music, Miller expressed an ardent ambition to be able to compose a Scots air. Mr. Clarke, partly by way of joke, told him to keep to the black keys of the harpsichord, and preserve some kind of rhythm, and he would infallibly compose a Scots air. Certain it is that, in a few days, Mr. Miller produced the rudiments of an air, which Mr. Clarke, with some touches and corrections, fashioned into the tune in question. Ritson, you know, has the same story of the *Black keys*: but this account which I have just given you, Mr. Clarke informed me of several years ago. Now, to show you how difficult it is to trace the origin of our airs, I have heard it repeatedly asserted that this was an Irish air: nay, I met with an Irish gentleman who affirmed he had heard it in Ireland among the old women: while, on the other hand, a lady of fashion, no less than a countess, informed me, that the first person who introduced the air into this country, was a baronet's lady of her acquaintance, who took down the notes from an itinerant piper in the

Isle of Man. How difficult, then, to ascertain the truth respecting our poesy and music! I myself have lately seen a couple of ballads sung through the streets of Dumfries, with my name at the head of them as the author, though it was the first time I had ever seen them.

I thank you for admitting "Craigieburn-wood;" and I shall take care to furnish you with a new chorus. In fact, the chorus was not my work, but a part of some old verses to the air. If I can catch myself in a more than ordinarily propitious moment, I shall write a new "Craigieburn-wood" altogether. My heart is much in the theme.

I am ashamed, my dear fellow, to make the request; 'tis dunning your generosity; but in a moment when I had forgotten whether I was rich or poor, I promised Chloris a copy of your songs. It wrings my honest pride to write you this; but an ungracious request is doubly so by a tedious apology. To make you some amends, as soon as I have extracted the necessary information out of them, I will return you Ritson's volumes.†

The lady is not a little proud that she is to make so distinguished a figure in your collection, and I am not a little proud that I have it in my power to please her so much. Lucky it is for your patience that my paper is done, for when I am in a scribbling humour, I know not when to give over.

R. B.

*[Second version: see both versions, Poetical Works (Thomson's Collection), p. 224.]

†[We think it right here to quote Mr. Thomson's reply to this request. "Let me beseech you not to use ceremony in telling me when you wish to present any of your friends with the songs. The next carrier will bring you three copies, and you are as welcome to twenty as to a pinch of snuff."]

(43.)

TO MR. THOMSON.

19th November, 1794.

You see, my dear Sir, what a punctual correspondent I am; though, indeed, you may thank yourself for the *tedium* of my letters, as you have so flattered me on my horsemanship with my favorite hobby, and have praised the grace of his ambling so much, that I am scarcely ever off his back. For instance, this morning, though a keen blowing frost, in my walk before breakfast, I finished my duet, which you were pleased to praise so much. Whether I have uniformly succeeded, I will not say; but here it is for you, though it is not an hour old.

O Philly, happy be the day, &c.

Tell me honestly how you like it, and point out whatever you think faulty.

I am much pleased with your idea of singing our songs in alternate stanzas, and regret that you did not hint it to me sooner. In those that remain I shall have it in my eye. I remember your objections to the name Philly; but it is the common abbreviation of Phillis. Sally, the only other name that suits, has, to my ear, a vulgarity about it, which

unfits it for any thing except burlesque. The legion of Scottish poetasters of the day, whom your brother editor, Mr. Ritson, ranks with me as my coevals, have always mistaken vulgarity for simplicity; whereas, simplicity is as much *eloignée* from vulgarity on the one hand, as from affected point and puerile conceit on the other.

I agree with you as to the air, "Craigieburn-wood," that a chorus would, in some degree, spoil the effect, and shall certainly have none in my projected song to it. It is not, however, a case in point with "Rothemurche;" there, as in "Roy's Wife of Aldivalloch," a chorus goes, to my taste, well enough. As to the chorus going first, that is the case with "Roy's Wife" as well as "Rothemurche." In fact, in the first part of both tunes, the rhythm is so peculiar and irregular, and on that irregularity depends so much of their beauty, that we must e'en take them with all their wildness, and humour the verse accordingly. Leaving out the starting note in both tunes, has, I think, an effect that no regularity could counterbalance the want of.

Try, { Oh Roy's Wife of Aldivalloch.
and { O lassie wi' the lint-white locks.

Compare with { Roy's Wife of Aldivalloch.
{ Lassie wi' the lint-white locks.

Does not the tameness of the prefixed syllable strike you? In the last case, with the true furor of genius, you strike at once into the wild originality of the air; whereas, in the first insipid method, it is like the grating screw of the pins before the fiddle is brought into tune. This is my taste; if I am wrong, I beg pardon of the *cognoscenti*.

[I am also of your mind as to the "Caledonian Hunt;" but to fit it with verses to suit these dotted crotchets will be a task indeed. I differ from you as to the expression of the air. It] is so charming, that it would make any subject in a song go down; but pathos is certainly its native tongue. Scottish bacchanalians we certainly want, though the few we have are excellent. For instance, "Todlin hame" is, for wit and humour, an unparalleled composition; and "Andrew and his cutty gun" is the work of a master. By the way, are you not quite vexed to think that those men of genius, for such they certainly were, who composed our fine Scottish lyrics should be unknown? It has given me many a heart-ache. Apropos to bacchanalian songs in Scottish; I composed one yesterday, for an air I like much—"Lumps o' pudding."

Contented wi' little and cantie wi' mair, &c.

If you do not relish this air, I will send it to Johnson.

[The two songs you saw in Clarke's are neither of them worthy of your attention. The words of "Auld Lang Syne" are good, but the music is an old air, the rudiments of the modern tune of that name. The other tune you may hear as a common country-dance.]

Since yesterday's penmanship, I have framed a couple of English stanzas, by way of an English song to "Roy's wife." You will allow me, that in this instance my English corresponds in sentiment with the Scottish.

Canst thou leave me thus, my Katy? &c.

Well! I think this to be done in two or three turns across my room, and with two or three pinches of Irish blackguard, is not so far amiss. You see I am determined to have my quantum of applause from somebody.

[Now for "When she cam ben she bobbit."

[Burns here repeats the song "Oh, saw ye my dear, my Phely?" but with the names Mary and Harry instead of Phely and Willy.]

I think these names will answer better than the former: and the rhythm of the song is as you desired.

I dislike your proposed alterations in two instances. "Logie o' Buchan," and "There's my Thumb, I'll ne'er beguile thee," are certainly fittest for your additional songs; and in their place, as two of the hundred, I would put the most beautiful of airs—"Whistle and I'll come to ye, my Lad," at all rates, as one. It is surely capable of feeling and sentiment, and the song is one of my best. For the other, keep your favorite "Muirland Willy," and with it close your hundred. As to the first being Irish, all that you can say is, that it has a twang of the Irish manner; but to infer from that, that of course it must be an Irish production, is unfair. In the neighbourhood and intercourse of the Scots and Irish, and both musical nations too, it is highly probable that composers of one nation would sometimes imitate or emulate the manner of the other. I never met with an Irishman who claimed this air: a pretty strong proof that it is Scottish. Just the same is the case with "Gramachree;" if it be really Irish, it is decidedly in the Scottish taste. That other air in your collection, "Oran-Gaoil," which you think is Irish, that nation claim as theirs by the name of "Caun du delish;" but look into Gow's publication of Scottish Songs, and you will find it as a Gaelic song, with the words in that language, a wretched translation of which original words is set to the tune in the Museum. Your worthy Gaelic priest gave me that translation, and at his table I heard both the original and the translation sung by a pretty large party of Highland gentlemen, all of whom had no other idea of the air than that it was a native of their country.

I am obliged to you for your goodness in your three copies, but will certainly return you two of them. Why should I take money out of your pocket?]*

Tell my friend Allan (for I am sure that we only want the trifling circumstance of being known to one another, to be the best friends on earth) that I much suspect he has, in his plates, mistaken the figure of the stock and horn. I have, at last, gotten one, but it is a very rude instrument. It is composed of three parts; the stock, which is the hinder thigh-bone of a sheep, such as you see in a mutton ham; the horn, which is a common Highland cow's horn, cut off at the smaller end, until the aperture be large enough to admit the stock to be pushed up through the horn until it be held by the thicker end of the thigh-bone; and lastly, an oaten reed exactly cut and notched like that which you see every shepherd boy have, when the corn stems are green and full-grown. The reed is not made fast in the bone, but is held by the lips, and plays loose in the smaller end of the stock; while the stock, with the horn hanging on its larger end is held by the hands in playing. The stock has six or seven ventiges on the upper side, and one back ventige, like the common flute.

This of mine was made by a man from the braes of Athole, and is exactly what the shepherds wont to use in that country.

However, either it is not quite properly bored in the holes, or else we have not the art of blowing it rightly; for we can make little of it. If Mr. Allan chuses, I will send him a sight of mine, as I look on myself to be a kind of brother-brush with him. "Pride in poets is nae sin;" and I will say it, that I look on Mr. Allan and Mr. Burns to be the only genuine and real painters of Scottish costume in the world.

R. B.

* [In reply, Mr. Thomson says, "Do not, I beseech you, return any books." Allan had seen a stock and horn: Thomson says, on the authority of a friend, that "the sound was abominable."]

(44.) TO MR. THOMSON.

[*Post-mark, December 9th,*] 1794.

It is, I assure you, the pride of my heart to do any thing to forward or add to the value of your book; and as I agree with you that the Jacobite song in the Museum to "There'll never be peace till Jamie comes hame," would not so well consort with Peter Pindar's excellent love-song to that air, I have just framed for you the following:—

Now in her green mantle, &c.

How does this please you? As to the point of time for the expression, in your proposed print from my "Sodger's Return," it must certainly be at—"She gaz'd." The interesting dubiety and suspense taking possession of her countenance, and the gushing fondness, with a mixture of roguish playfulness in his, strike me as things of which a master will make a great deal. In great haste, but in great truth, yours,

R. B.

(45.) TO MR. THOMSON.

January, 1795.

I FEAR for my songs; however a few may please, yet originality is a coy feature in composition, and in a multiplicity of efforts in the same style, disappears altogether. For these three thousand years, we poetic folks have been describing the spring for instance; and as the spring continues the same, there must soon be a sameness in the imagery, &c., of these said rhyming folks * * * * *

A great critic (Aikin) on songs, says that love and wine are the exclusive themes for song-writing. The following is on neither subject, and consequently is no song; but will be allowed, I think, to be two or three pretty good prose thoughts inverted into rhyme.

Is there for honest poverty, &c.

Jan. 15th.

The foregoing has lain by me this fortnight, for want of a spare moment. The Supervisor of Excise here being ill, I have been acting for him, and I assure you I have hardly

five minutes to myself to thank you for your elegant present of Pindar. The typography is admirable, and worthy of the truly original bard.

I do not give you the foregoing song for your book, but merely by way of *vive la bagatelle*; for the piece is not really poetry. How will the following do for "Craigie-burn Wood?"—

Sweet fa's the eve on Craigie-burn, &c.

Farewell! God bless you!

R. B.

(46.) TO MR. THOMSON.

Ecclefechan, 7th February, 1795.

MY DEAR THOMSON,

You cannot have any idea of the predicament in which I write to you. In the course of my duty as Supervisor (in which capacity I have acted of late), I came yesternight to this unfortunate, wicked little village.* I have gone forward, but snows of ten feet deep have impeded my progress: I have tried to "gae back the gate I cam again," but the same obstacle has shut me up within insuperable bars. To add to my misfortune, since dinner, a scraper has been torturing catgut, in sounds that would have insulted the dying agonies of a sow under the hands of a butcher, and thinks himself, on that very account, exceeding good company. In fact, I have been in a dilemma, either to get drunk, to forget these miseries; or to hang myself to get rid of them: like a prudent man (a character congenial to my every thought, word, and deed) I, of two evils, have chosen the least, and am very drunk, at your service!

I wrote you yesterday from Dumfries. I had not time then to tell you all I wanted to say; and, Heaven knows, at present I have not capacity.

Do you know an air—I am sure you must know it—"We'll gang nae mair to yon town?" I think, in slowish time, it would make an excellent song. I am highly delighted with it; and if you should think it worthy of your attention, I have a fair dame in my eye to whom I would consecrate it. [Try it with this doggrel—until I give you a better:

O wat ye wha's in yon town, &c.]

As I am just going to bed, I wish you a good night.

R. B.

[P.S.—As I am likely to be storm-staid here to-morrow, if I am in the humour, you shall have a long letter from me.]

* [Dr. Currie, who was a native of the district, thus protests against our Author's verdict—"The Bard must have been tipsy indeed, to abuse sweet Ecclefechan at this rate" It is worth remarking, that before the end of this very year (4th December, 1795), no less distinguished a personage than Thomas Carlyle was born in the immediate neighbourhood.]

(47.) TO MR. THOMSON.

[Post-mark, February 9,] 1795.

[I AM afraid, my dear Sir, that printing your songs in the manner of Ritson's would counteract the sale of your greater work; but, secluded as I am from the world, its humours and caprices, I cannot pretend to judge in the matter. If you are ultimately frustrated of Pleyel's assistance, what think you of applying to Clarke? This, you will say, would be breaking faith with your subscribers; but, bating that circumstance, I am confident that Clarke is equal, in *Scottish song*, to take up the pen even after Pleyel.

I shall at a future period write you my sentiments as to sending my bagatelles to a newspaper.]

Here is another trial at your favorite air:

[SONG.]

Tune.—“Let me in this ae night.”

O lassie, art thou sleeping yet? &c.

[HER ANSWER.]

O tell na me o' wind and rain, &c.

I do not know whether it will do.

R. B.

(48.) TO MR. THOMSON.

[May,] 1795.

[SONG.]

O wat ye wha's in yon town, &c.

[YOUR objection to the last two stanzas of my song, “Let me in this ae night,” does not strike me as just. You will take notice that my heroine is replying quite at her ease, and when she talks of “faithless man,” she gives not the least reason to believe that she speaks from her own experience, but merely from observation of what she has seen around her. But of all boring matters in this boring world, criticising my own works is the greatest bore.]

[SONG.]

O stay, sweet warbling woodlark, stay, &c.

Let me know, your very first leisure, how you like this song.

[SONG.]

Long, long the night, &c.

How do you like the foregoing? The Irish air, “Humors of Glen,” is a great favorite of mine, and as, except the silly stuff in the “Poor Soldier,” there are not any decent verses for it, I have written for it as follows:—

Their groves o' sweet myrtle let foreign lands reckon, &c.

Yours,

R. B.

P.S.—Stop! Turn over. [Here follows song.]

'Twas na her bonnie blue e'e was my ruin, &c.

Let me hear from you.

(49.) TO MR. THOMSON.

[Post-mark, May 9,] 1795.

[SONGS.]

How cruel are the parents, &c.

Mark yonder pomp of costly fashion, &c.

WELL, this is not amiss. You see how I answer your orders—your tailor could not be more punctual. I am just now in a high fit for poetising, provided the strait-jacket of criticism don't cure me. If you can, in a post or two, administer a little of the intoxicating potion of your applause, it will raise your humble servant's phrenzy to any height you want. I am at this moment “holding high converse” with the muses, and have not a word to throw away on such a prosaic dog as you.

R. B.

(50.) TO MR. THOMSON.

May, 1795.

TEN thousand thanks for your elegant present—though I am ashamed of the value of it being bestowed on a man who has not, by any means, merited such an instance of kindness. I have shown it to two or three judges of the first abilities here, and they all agree with me in classing it as a first-rate production. My phiz is sae kenspeckle, that the very joiner's apprentice, whom Mrs. Burns employed to break up the parcel (I was out of town that day), knew it at once. My most grateful compliments to Allan, who has honoured my rustic muse so much with his masterly pencil. One strange coincidence is, that the little one who is making the felonious attempt on the cat's tail, is the most striking likeness of an ill-deedie, d—n'd, wee rumble-gairie urchin of mine, whom from that propensity to witty wickedness, and manfu' mischief, which, even at twa days' auld, I foresaw would form the striking features of his disposition, I named Willie Nicol, after a certain friend of mine, who is one of the masters of a grammar-school in a city which shall be nameless. [Several people think that Allan's likeness of me is more striking than Nasmyth's, for which I sat to him half-a-dozen times. However, there is an artist of considerable merit just now in this town, who has hit the most remarkable likeness of what I am at this moment, that I think ever was taken of anybody. It is a small miniature, and as it will be in your town getting itself be-crystallised, &c., I have some thoughts of suggesting to you to prefix a vignette taken from it to my song, “Contented wi' Little, and Cantie wi' Mair,” in order the portrait of my face and the picture of my mind may go down the stream of Time together.*

Now to business. I enclose you a song of merit, to a well-known air, which is to be one of yours. It was written by a lady, and has never yet seen the press. If you like it better than the ordinary “Woo'd and Married,” or if you chuse to

insert this also, you are welcome; only, return me this copy. "The Lothian Lassie" I also enclose; the song is well-known, but was never in notes before. The first part is the old tune. It is a great favorite of mine, and here I have the honor of being of the same opinion with STANDARD CLARKE. I think it would make a fine andante ballad.]

Give the enclosed epigram to my much-valued friend Cunningham, and tell him, that on Wednesday I go to visit a friend of his, to whom his friendly partiality in speaking of me in a manner introduced me—I mean, a well-known military and literary character, Colonel Dirom.

You do not tell me how you liked my two last songs. Are they condemned?

R. B.

*[See History of Kerry Miniatures—Appendix.]

(51.) TO MR. THOMSON.

[ENGLISH SONG.]

Forlorn, my love, no comfort near, &c.

How do you like the foregoing? I have written it within this hour: so much for the speed of my Pegasus; but what say you to his bottom?

R. B.

(52.) TO MR. THOMSON.

[SCOTTISH BALLAD.]

Last May a braw wooer, &c.

[FRAGMENT.]

Why, why tell thy lover? &c.

SUCH is the peculiarity of the rhythm of this air, that I find it impossible to make another stanza to suit it.

I am at present quite occupied with the charming sensations of the toothache, so have not a word to spare.

R. B.

(53.) TO MR. THOMSON.

[Post-mark, August 3,] 1795.

[DID I mention to you that I wish to alter the first line of the English song to "Leiger m' chose," or the "Quaker's Wife," from

Thine am I, my faithful fair,
to

Thine am I, my Chloris fair.

If you neglect the alteration, I call on all the NINE, conjunctly and severally, to anathematise you!]

In "Whistle, and I'll come to ye, my lad," the iteration of that line is tiresome to my ear. Here goes what I think is an improvement:—

O whistle, and I'll come to ye, my lad;
O whistle, and I'll come to ye, my lad;
Tho' father and mother and a' should gae mad,
Thy Jeanie will venture wi' ye, my lad.

In fact, a fair dame, at whose shrine I, the Priest of the Nine, offer up the incense of Parnassus—a dame whom the Graces have attired in witchcraft, and whom the Loves have armed with lightning—a fair one, herself the heroine of the song, insists on the amendment, and dispute her commands if you dare!

Gateslack, the word you object to, is the name of a particular place, a kind of passage up among the Lawther Hills, on the confines of this county. Dalgarnock is also the name of a romantic spot near the Nith, where are still a ruined church and a burial-ground. However, let the first run—

He up the lang loan, &c.

[SONG.]

O this is no my ain lassie, &c.

Do you know that you have roused the torpidity of Clarke at last? He has requested me to write three or four songs for him, which he is to set to music himself. The enclosed sheet contains two songs for him, which please to present to my valued friend Cunningham.

I enclose the sheet open, both for your inspection, and that you may copy the song "O bonnie was yon rosy brier." I do not know whether I am right, but that song pleases me; and as it is extremely probable that Clarke's newly-roused celestial spark will soon be smothered in the fogs of indolence, if you like the song, it may go as Scottish verses to the air of "I wish my love was in a mire;" and poor Erskine's English lines may follow.

I enclose you a "For a' that and a' that," which was never in print; it is a much superior song to mine. I have been told that it was composed by a lady. [At this point comes "enclosed sheet" containing songs—

Now Spring has clad the groves in green, &c.,
and O bonnie was yon rosy brier, &c.

Then follow lines] written on the blank leaf of a copy of the last edition of my poems, presented to the lady whom, in so many fictitious reveries of passion, but with the most ardent sentiments of real friendship, I have so often sung under the name of Chloris:—

'Tis friendship's pledge, my young, fair friend, &c.

Une bagatelle de l'amitié.

COILA.

(54.) TO MR. THOMSON.

February, 1796.

MANY thanks, my dear Sir, for your handsome, elegant present to Mrs. Burns, and for my remaining volume of P. Pindar. Peter is a delightful fellow, and a first favorite of mine. I am much pleased with your idea of publishing a collection of our songs in octavo, with etchings. I am

extremely willing to lend every assistance in my power. The Irish airs I shall cheerfully undertake the task of finding verses for.

I have already, you know, equipt three with words, and the other day I strung up a kind of rhapsody to another Hibernian melody, which I admire much.

Awa wi' your witchcraft o' beauty's alarms, &c.

If this will do, you have now four of my Irish engagement. In my by-past songs I dislike one thing, the name Chloris—I meant it as the fictitious name of a certain lady: but, on second thoughts, it is a high incongruity to have a Greek appellation to a Scottish pastoral ballad. Of this, and some things else, in my next: I have more amendments to propose. What you once mentioned of "flaxen locks" is just: they cannot enter into an elegant description of beauty. Of this also again—God bless you!

R. B.

(55.) TO MR. THOMSON.

April, 1796.

ALAS! my dear Thomson, I fear it will be some time ere I tune my lyre again! "By Babel streams I have sat and wept" almost ever since I wrote you last: I have only known existence by the pressure of the heavy hand of sickness, and have counted time by the repercussions of pain! Rheumatism, cold, and fever have formed to me a terrible combination. I close my eyes in misery, and open them without hope. I look on the vernal day, and say with poor Fergusson,

"Say wherefore has an all-indulgent heaven
Light to the comfortless and wretched given?"

This will be delivered to you by Mrs. Hyslop, landlady of the Globe Tavern here, which for these many years has been my howff, and where our friend Clarke and I have had many a merry squeeze. I am highly delighted with Mr. Allan's etchings. "Woo'd an' married an' a'," is admirable! The grouping is beyond all praise. The expression of the figures, conformable to the story in the ballad, is absolutely faultless perfection. I next admire "Turnimspike." What I like least is "Jenny said to Jockey." Besides the female being in her appearance [quite a virago], if you take her stooping into the account, she is at least two inches taller than her lover. Poor Cleghorn! I sincerely sympathise with him. Happy I am to think that he has yet a well-grounded hope of health and enjoyment in this world. As for me—but that is a damning subject!

R. B.

(56.) TO MR. THOMSON.

[About May 17, 1796.]

MY DEAR SIR,

I ONCE mentioned to you an air which I have long admired—"Here's a health to them that's awa, Hiney," but I forget if you took any notice of it. I have just been trying to suit

it with verses, and I beg leave to recommend the air to your attention once more. I have only begun it.

Here's a health to ane I lo'e dear, &c.

This will be delivered by a Mr. Lewars, a young fellow of uncommon merit, [indeed by far the cleverest fellow I have met with in this part of the world. His only fault is D-mocratic heresy]. As he will be a day or two in town, you will have leisure, if you chuse, to write me by him: and if you have a spare half-hour to spend with him, I shall place your kindness to my account. I have no copies of the songs I have sent you, and I have taken a fancy to review them all, and possibly may mend some of them; so when you have complete leisure, I will thank you for either the originals or copies. I had rather be the author of five well-written songs than of ten otherwise. [My verses to "Cauld Kail" I will suppress; as also those to "Laddie lie near me." They are neither worthy of my name nor of your book.] I have great hopes that the genial influence of the approaching summer will set me to rights, but as yet I cannot boast of returning health. I have now reason to believe that my complaint is a flying gout—a sad business.

Do let me know how Cleghorn is, and remember me to him.

This should have been delivered to you a month ago, [but my friend's trunk miscarried, and was not recovered till he came here again].* I am still very poorly, but should like much to hear from you.

R. B.

* [Our readers will remember that the last letter to Johnson was in the same predicament. Mr. Lewars's trunk is there called saddle-bags. See Letter (5) to Johnson.]

[The letter appears to have been dispatched by post on the 17th June. Currie unaccountably divides the letter into two.—*Chambers*. This so far determines the date of last letter to Johnson. Compare Note to Chambers's Edition of Letter (4) to Johnson, *infra*.]

(57.) TO MR. THOMSON.

Brow, on the Solway-firth, 12th July, 1796.

AFTER all my boasted independence, curst necessity compels me to implore you for five pounds. A cruel wretch of a haberdasher, to whom I owe an account, taking it into his head that I am dying, has commenced a process, and will infallibly put me into jail. Do, for God's sake, send me that sum, and that by return of post. Forgive me this earnestness, but the horrors of a jail have made me half distracted. I do not ask all this gratuitously; for, upon returning health, I hereby promise and engage to furnish you with five pounds' worth of the neatest song-genius you have seen. I tried my hand on "Rothemurche" this morning. The measure is so difficult that it is impossible to infuse much genius into the lines; they are on the other side. Forgive, forgive me!*

Fairest maid on Devon's banks, &c.

R. B.

* [To this application Mr. Thomson replied as follows—

14th July, 1796.

MY DEAR SIR,

EVER since I received your melancholy letter, by Mrs. Hyslop, I have been ruminating in what manner I could endeavour to alleviate your sufferings. Again and again I thought of a pecuniary offer, but the recollection of one of your letters on this subject, and the fear of offending your independent spirit, checked my resolution. I thank you heartily therefore for the frankness of your letter of the 12th, and with great pleasure inclose a draft for the very sum I proposed sending. Would I were Chancellor of the Exchequer but for one day, for your sake!

Pray, my good Sir, is it not possible for you to muster a volume of poetry? If too much trouble to you in the present state of your health, some literary friend might be found here, who would select and arrange from your manuscripts, and take upon him the task of Editor. In the meantime, it could be advertised to be published by subscription. Do not shun this mode of obtaining the value of your labour: remember Pope published the *Iliad* by subscription. Think of this, my dear Burns, and do not reckon me intrusive with my advice. You are too well convinced of the respect and friendship I bear you, to impute any thing I say to an unworthy motive. Yours faithfully.

The verses to *Rothemurche* will answer finely. I am happy to see you can still tune your lyre.]

[In Mr. Chambers's edition the following version of Letter (4) to James Johnson appears; which, as it differs considerably from the one given in our own text, we think proper to present entire.]

[To Mr. James Johnson.]

Dumfries [February], 1794.

MY DEAR SIR,

I SEND you by my friend, Mr. Wallace, forty-one songs for your fifth volume. Mr. Clarke has also a good many, if he have not, with his usual indolence, *cast them at the cocks*. I have still a good parcel amongst my hands in scraps and fragments; so that I hope we will make shift with our last volume.

You should have heard from me long ago; but over and above some vexatious share in the pecuniary losses of these accursed times, I have all this winter been plagued with low spirits and blue devils; so that *I have almost hung my harp on the willow trees*.

In the meantime, at your leisure, give a copy of the *Museum* to my worthy friend, Mr. Peter Hill, bookseller, to bind for me, interleaved with blank leaves, exactly as he did the Laird of Glenriddel's, that I may insert every anecdote I can learn, together with my own criticisms and remarks on the songs. A copy of this kind I shall leave with you, the editor, to publish at some after-period, by way of making the *Museum* a book famous to the end of time, and you renowned for ever.

I have got a Highland dirk, for which I have great veneration, as it once was the dirk of Lord Balmerino. It fell into bad hands, who stripped it of the silver mounting, as well as the knife and fork. I have some thoughts of sending it to your care, to get it mounted anew. Our friend Clarke owes me an account, somewhere about one pound, which would go a good way in paying the expense. I remember you once settled an account in this way before, and as you still have money-matters to settle with him, you might accommodate us both * * * * My best compliments to your worthy old father and your better half.

Yours,

R. B.

[It is obvious at a glance, that this edition by Mr. Chambers has been from a rough draft, which the writer on consideration, and with great delicacy and good taste, had thrown aside. The reference to Clarke's debt in the circumstances was not like Robert Burns, neither were "best compliments" to his correspondent's "worthy old father"—and so the original idea of the letter was abandoned. Besides, in the mean time, "copies of my Volunteer Ballad" had come to hand (see Letter (4), p. 80), in which "Our friend Clarke has done *indeed* well! 'tis chaste and beautiful!" &c. So it appears, after all, that Clarke had not been casting his musical pearls "*at the cocks*." The receipt of the Volunteer Ballad, in short, had occasioned the re-writing of the whole letter, in which all reference to debt and indolence disappears: a very beautiful illustration of the Poet's moral nature, and the writer's private life.

A similar confusion occurs with respect to the last letter (5) of the same series; where, however, Mr. Chambers appears simply to have quoted from Cromek, who seems to have had nothing more than a copy *ex parte* by the Author before him. He states expressly, indeed, that "This letter was written on the 4th of July—the Poet died on the 21st." We have already explained that the letter actually sent to Johnson had *no date whatever*; and we see from letter to Thomson (5), posted 17th June, that it must have been written, or rather opened and finished, about the same time. The edition by Cromek and Chambers contains no reference at all to Lewars or the lost saddle-bags, but only the substance of the document itself: from which it appears undoubtedly to have been a mere copy.]

SUBORDINATE.

(1.) To Mr. John Murdoch,

SCHOOLMASTER,

STAPLES-INN BUILDINGS, LONDON.

Lochlea, 15th January, 1783.

DEAR SIR,

As I have an opportunity of sending you a letter without putting you to that expense, which any production of mine would but ill repay, I embrace it with pleasure, to tell you that I have not forgotten, nor ever will forget, the many obligations I lie under to your kindness and friendship.

I do not doubt, Sir, but you will wish to know what has been the result of all the pains of an indulgent father, and a masterly teacher; and I wish I could gratify your curiosity with such a recital as you would be pleased with; but that is what I am afraid will not be the case. I have, indeed, kept pretty clear of vicious habits; and in this respect, I hope, my conduct will not disgrace the education I have gotten; but, as a man of the world, I am most miserably deficient. One would have thought that, bred as I have been, under a father who has figured pretty well as *un homme des affaires*, I might have been what the world calls a pushing, active fellow; but to tell you the truth, Sir, there

is hardly anything more my reverse. I seem to be one sent into the world to see and observe; and I very easily compound with the knave who tricks me of my money, if there be anything original about him, which shews me human nature in a different light from anything I have seen before. In short, the joy of my heart is to "study men, their manners, and their ways;" and for this darling subject, I cheerfully sacrifice every other consideration. I am quite indolent about those great concerns that set the bustling, busy sons of care a-gog; and if I have to answer for the present hour, I am very easy with regard to anything further. Even the last, worst shift of the unfortunate and the wretched does not much terrify me: I know that my talent for what country folks call "a sensible crack," when once it is sanctified by a hoary head, would procure me so much esteem, that even then—I would learn to be happy.* However, I am under no apprehensions about that; for though indolent, yet so far as an extremely delicate constitution permits, I am not lazy; and in many things, especially in tavern matters, I am a strict economist—not, indeed, for the sake of the money; but one of the principal parts in my composition is a kind of pride of stomach; and I scorn to fear the face of any man living: above everything, I abhor as hell the idea of sneaking in a corner to avoid a dun—possibly some pitiful, sordid wretch, whom in my heart I despise and detest. 'Tis this, and this alone, that endears economy to me. In the matter of books, indeed, I am very profuse. My favorite authors are of the sentimental kind, such as Shenstone, particularly his "Elegies;" Thomson; "Man of Feeling"—a book I prize next to the Bible; "Man of the World;" Sterne, especially his "Sentimental Journey;" Macpherson's "Ossian," &c.; these are the glorious models after which I endeavour to form my conduct, and 'tis incongruous, 'tis absurd to suppose that the man whose mind glows with sentiments lighted up at their sacred flame—the man whose heart distends with benevolence to all the human race—he "who can soar above this little scene of things"—can he descend to mind the paltry concerns about which the terræfilial race fret, and fume, and vex themselves! O how the glorious triumph swells my heart! I forget that I am a poor, insignificant devil, unnoticed and unknown, stalking up and down fairs and markets, when I happen to be in them, reading a page or two of mankind, and "catching the manners living as they rise," whilst the men of business jostle me on every side, as an idle incumbrance in their way. But I daresay I have by this time tired your patience; so I shall conclude with begging you to give Mrs. Murdoch—not my compliments, for that is a mere commonplace story—but my warmest, kindest wishes for her welfare; and accept of the same for yourself, from,

Dear Sir, yours,

R. B.

* [The last shift here alluded to, must be the condition of an itinerant beggar.—*Currie.*]

[Thus also, exactly two years afterwards, in "Epistle to Davie"—
The last o't, the warst o't,
Is only hut to beg.]

(2.)

TO MR. MURDOCH,

TEACHER OF FRENCH, LONDON.

Ellisland, 16th July, 1790.

MY DEAR SIR,

I RECEIVED a letter from you a long time ago, but unfortunately, as it was in the time of my peregrinations and journeyings through Scotland, I mislaid or lost it, and by consequence your direction along with it. Luckily my good star brought me acquainted with Mr. Kennedy, who, I understand, is an acquaintance of yours: and by his means and mediation I hope to replace that link which my unfortunate negligence had so unluckily broke in the chain of our correspondence. I was the more vexed at the vile accident, as my brother William, a journeyman saddler, has been for some time in London; and wished above all things for your direction, that he might have paid his respects to his father's friend.

His last address he sent to me was, "Wm. Burns, at Mr. Barber's, saddler, No. 181 Strand." I writ him by Mr. Kennedy, but neglected to ask him for your address; so, if you find a spare half-minute, please let my brother know by a card where and when he will find you, and the poor fellow will joyfully wait on you, as one of the few surviving friends of the man whose name, and christian name too, he has the honor to bear.*

The next letter I write you shall be a long one. I have much to tell you of "hair-breadth 'scapes in th' imminent deadly breach," with all the eventful history of a life, the early years of which owed so much to your kind tutorage; but this at an hour of leisure. My kindest compliments to Mrs. Murdoch, and family. I am ever, my dear Sir,

Your obliged friend,

R. B.

* [In less than a month, this worthy man was called on to officiate as chief mourner at William's funeral: see Domestic Correspondence.]

To Mr. Walker,

BLAIR OF ATHOLE.

Inverness, 5th September, 1787.

MY DEAR SIR,

I HAVE just time to write the foregoing, and to tell you that it was (at least most part of it) the effusion of an half-hour I spent at Bruar.* I do not mean it was extempore, for I have endeavoured to brush it up as well as Mr. Nicol's chat and the jogging of the chaise would allow. It eases my heart a good deal, as rhyme is the coin with which a poet pays his debts of honor or gratitude. What I owe to the noble family of Athole, of the first kind, I shall ever proudly boast; what I owe of the last, so help me God in my hour of need! I shall never forget.

The "little angel-band!" I declare I prayed for them very sincerely to-day at the Fall of Fyers. I shall never forget the fine family-piece I saw at Blair; the amiable, the truly noble duchess, with her smiling little seraph in her lap, at the

head of the table; the lovely "olive plants," as the Hebrew bard finely says, round the happy mother; the beautiful Mrs. Graham; the lovely sweet Miss Cathcart, &c. I wish I had the powers of Guido to do them justice! My Lord Duke's kind hospitality—markedly kind indeed. Mr. Graham of Fintry's charms of conversation—Sir W. Murray's friendship. In short, the recollection of all that polite, agreeable company raises an honest glow in my bosom.

R. B.

* [The poem here referred to was "The humble Petition of Brnar Water." Mr. Josiah Walker, then tutor to His Grace's family at Athole, was afterwards, as our readers are already aware, Professor of Humanity in Glasgow College, and a biographer of Burns. His somewhat pedantic manner in the chair did great injustice to his own worth and literary attainments. He was in reality both a kind-hearted obliging man, and one of the most accomplished scholars, both in Latinity and in English Classic Literature, of his day. We think it only right to make this addition to our former note. Poet. Works, p. 249.]

(1.) **To James Hoy, Esq.,**

GORDON CASTLE.

[At Gordon Castle, Burns had formed an acquaintance with a Mr. James Hoy, ostensibly librarian to the Duke, but rather a kind of humble companion; a sensible, learned person, who is described as having lived in that princely mansion for forty-six years (previous to his death in 1828) without ever losing the Dominie-Sampson-like purity of heart and simplicity of manners by which he was distinguished.—*Chambers*.]

Edinburgh, 20th October, 1787.

SIR,

I WILL defend my conduct in giving you this trouble, on the best of Christian principles,—“Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them.” I shall certainly, among my legacies, leave my latest curse to that unlucky predicament which hurried—tore me away from Castle Gordon. May that obstinate son of Latin prose [Nicol] be curst to Scotch-mile periods, and damned to seven-league paragraphs; while Declension and Conjugation, Gender, Number, and Tense, under the ragged banners of Dissonance and Disarrangement, eternally rank against him in hostile array.

Allow me, Sir, to strengthen the small claim I have to your acquaintance, by the following request. An engraver, James Johnson, in Edinburgh, has, not from mercenary views, but from an honest Scotch enthusiasm, set about collecting all our native songs and setting them to music; particularly those that have never been set before. Clarke, the well-known musician, presides over the musical arrangement, and Drs. Beattie and Blacklock, Mr. Tytler of Woodhouselee, and your humble servant to the utmost of his small power, assist in collecting the old poetry, or sometimes for a fine air make a stanza, when it has no words. The brats, too tedious to mention, claim a parental pang from my bardship. I suppose it will appear in Johnson's second number—the first was published before my acquaintance with him. My request is—“Cauld Kail in Aberdeen” is one intended for this number, and I beg a copy of his Grace of Gordon's words to it, which you were so kind as to repeat to me. You

may be sure we won't prefix the author's name, except you like, though I look on it as no small merit to this work that the names of so many of the authors of our old Scotch songs, names almost forgotten, will be inserted. I do not well know where to write to you—I rather write at you: but if you will be so obliging, immediately on receipt of this, as to write me a few lines, I shall perhaps pay you in kind, though not in quality. Johnson's terms are:—each number a handsome pocket volume, to consist at least of a hundred Scotch songs, with basses for the harpsichord, &c. The price to subscribers, 5s.; to non-subscribers, 6s. He will have three numbers, I conjecture.

My direction for two or three weeks will be at Mr. William Cruikshank's, St. James's Square, New-town, Edinburgh.

I am, Sir, yours to command,

R. B.

(2.) **TO JAMES HOY, Esq.,**

AT GORDON CASTLE, FOCHABERS.

Edinburgh, 6th November, 1787.

DEAR SIR,

I WOULD have wrote you immediately on receipt of your kind letter, but a mixed impulse of gratitude and esteem whispered to me that I ought to send you something by way of return. When a poet owes anything, particularly when he is indebted for good offices, the payment that usually recurs to him—the only coin indeed in which he probably is conversant—is rhyme. Johnson sends the books by the fly, as directed, and begs me to enclose his most grateful thanks: my return I intended should have been one or two poetic bagatelles which the world have not seen, or, perhaps, for obvious reasons, cannot see. These I shall send you before I leave Edinburgh. They may make you laugh a little, which, on the whole, is no bad way of spending one's precious hours and still more precious breath: at any rate, they will be, though a small, yet a very sincere mark of my respectful esteem for a gentleman whose further acquaintance I should look upon as a peculiar obligation.

The Duke's song, independent totally of his dukeship, charms me. There is I know not what of wild happiness of thought and expression peculiarly beautiful in the old Scottish song style, of which his Grace, old venerable Skinner, the author of “Tullochgorum,” &c., and the late Ross, at Lochlee, of true Scottish poetic memory, are the only modern instances that I recollect, since Ramsay with his contemporaries, and poor Bob Fergusson went to the world of deathless existence and truly immortal song. The mob of mankind, that many-headed beast, would laugh at so serious a speech about an old song; but, as Job says, “O that mine adversary had written a book!” Those who think that composing a Scotch song is a trifling business—let them try it.

I wish my Lord Duke would pay a proper attention to

the Christian admonition—"Hide not your candle under a bushel," but "let your light shine before men." I could name half a dozen dukes that I guess are a devilish deal worse employed: nay, I question if there are half a dozen better: perhaps there are not half that scanty number whom Heaven has favored with the tuneful, happy, and, I will say, glorious gift.

I am, dear Sir,

Your obliged humble servant,

R. B.

(1.) To Rev. John Skinner.

Edinburgh, October 25, 1787.

REVEREND AND VENERABLE SIR,

ACCEPT, in plain dull prose, my most sincere thanks for the best poetical compliment I ever received.* I assure you, Sir, as a poet, you have conjured up an airy demon of vanity in my fancy, which the best abilities in your other capacity would be ill able to lay. I regret, and while I live I shall regret, that when I was in the north, I had not the pleasure of paying a younger brother's dutiful respects to the author of the best Scotch song ever Scotland saw—"Tullochgorum's my delight!" The world may think slightly of the craft of song-making if they please, but, as Job says—"O! that mine adversary had written a book!"—let them try. There is a certain something in the old Scotch songs, a wild happiness of thought and expression, which peculiarly marks them not only from English songs, but also from the modern efforts of song-wrights, in our native manner and language. The only remains of this enchantment, these spells of the imagination, rest with you. Our true brother, Ross of Lochlee, was likewise "owre cannie"—"a wild warlock"—but now he sings among the "sons of the morning."

I have often wished, and will certainly endeavour to form a kind of common acquaintance among all the genuine sons of Caledonian song. The world, busy in low prosaic pursuits, may overlook most of us; but "reverence thyself." The world is not our *peers*, so we challenge the jury. We can lash that world, and find ourselves a very great source of amusement and happiness independent of that world.

There is a work going on in Edinburgh just now which claims your best assistance. An engraver in this town has set about collecting and publishing all the Scotch songs, with the music, that can be found. Songs in the English language, if by Scotchmen, are admitted, but the music must all be Scotch. Drs. Beattie and Blacklock are lending a hand, and the first musician in town presides over that department. I have been absolutely crazed about it, collecting old stanzas, and every information remaining respecting their origin, authors, &c., &c. This last is but a very fragment business; but at the end of his second number—the first is already published—a small account will be given of the authors, particularly to preserve those of latter times. Your three

songs, "Tullochgorum," "John of Badenyon," and "Ewie wi' the Crookit Horn," go in this second number. I was determined, before I got your letter, to write you, begging that you would let me know where the editions of these pieces may be found, as you would wish them to continue in future times; and if you would be so kind to this undertaking as send any songs, of your own or others, that you would think proper to publish, your name will be inserted among the other authors,—"Nill ye, will ye." One half of Scotland already give your songs to other authors. Paper is done. I beg to hear from you; the sooner the better, as I leave Edinburgh in a fortnight or three weeks.

I am, with the warmest sincerity, Sir,

Your obliged humble servant,

R. B.

*[See conclusion of Literary Correspondence.]

(2.) TO REV. JOHN SKINNER.

Edinburgh, February 14th, 1788.

REVEREND AND DEAR SIR,

I HAVE been a cripple now near three months, though I am getting vastly better, and have been very much hurried besides, or else I would have wrote you sooner. I must beg your pardon for the epistle you sent me appearing in the Magazine. I had given a copy or two to some of my intimate friends, but did not know of the printing of it till the publication of the Magazine. However, as it does great honor to us both, you will forgive it.

The second volume of the songs I mentioned to you in my last is published to-day. I send you a copy, which I beg you will accept as a mark of the veneration I have long had, and shall ever have, for your character, and of the claim I make to your continued acquaintance. Your songs appear in the third volume, with your name in the index; as, I assure you, Sir, I have heard your "Tullochgorum," particularly among our west-country folks, given to many different names, and most commonly to the immortal author of "The Minstrel," who, indeed, never wrote anything superior to "Gie's a sang, Montgomery cried." Your brother has promised me your verses to the Marquis of Huntly's reel, which certainly deserve a place in the collection. My kind host, Mr. Cruikshank, of the High School here, and said to be one of the best Latins in this age, begs me to make you his grateful acknowledgments for the entertainment he has got in a Latin publication of yours, that I borrowed for him from your acquaintance and much respected friend in this place, the Reverend Dr. Webster. Mr. Cruikshank maintains that you write the best Latin since Buchanan. I leave Edinburgh to-morrow, but shall return in three weeks. Your song you mentioned in your last, to the tune of "Dumbarton Drums," and the other, which you say was done by a brother in trade of mine, a ploughman, I shall thank you for a copy of each. I am ever, Reverend Sir, with the most respectful esteem and sincere veneration, yours,

R. B.

(1.) To Professor Dugald Stewart.

Mauchline, 3d May, 1788.

SIR,

I ENCLOSE you one or two more of my bagatelles. If the fervent wishes of honest gratitude have any influence with that great unknown Being who frames the chain of causes and events, prosperity and happiness will attend your visit to the continent, and return you safe to your native shore.

Wherever I am, allow me, Sir, to claim it as my privilege to acquaint you with my progress in my trade of rhymes; as I am sure I could say it with truth, that next to my little fame, and the having it in my power to make life more comfortable to those whom nature has made dear to me, I shall ever regard your countenance, your patronage, your friendly good offices, as the most valued consequence of my late success in life.

R. B.

(2.) TO PROFESSOR DUGALD STEWART.

Ellisland, 20th Jan., 1789.

SIR,

THE inclosed sealed packet I sent to Edinburgh a few days after I had the happiness of meeting you in Ayrshire, but you were gone for the Continent. I have now added a few more of my productions, those for which I am indebted to the Nithsdale muses. The piece inscribed to R. G., Esq., is a copy of verses I sent Mr. Graham, of Fintray, accompanying a request for his assistance in a matter to me of very great moment. To that gentleman I am already doubly indebted for deeds of kindness of serious import to my dearest interests, done in a manner grateful to the delicate feelings of sensibility. This poem is a species of composition new to me, but I do not intend it shall be my last essay of the kind, as you will see by the "Poet's Progress." These fragments, if my design succeed, are but a small part of the intended whole. I propose it shall be the work of my utmost exertions, ripened by years; of course I do not wish it much known. The fragment beginning "A little, upright, pert, tart, &c.," I have not shown to man living, till I now send it you. It forms the postulata, the axioms, the definition of a character, which, if it appear at all, shall be placed in a variety of lights. This particular part I send you merely as a sample of my hand at portrait-sketching; but, lest idle conjecture should pretend to point out the original, please to let it be for your single, sole inspection.

Need I make any apology for this trouble to a gentleman who has treated me with such marked benevolence and peculiar kindness—who has entered into my interests with so much zeal, and on whose critical decisions I can so fully depend? A poet as I am by trade, these decisions are to me of the last consequence. My late transient acquaintance among some of the mere rank and file of greatness, I resign with ease; but to the distinguished champions of genius and

learning, I shall be ever ambitious of being known. The native genius and accurate discernment in Mr. Stewart's critical strictures; the justness (iron justice, for he has no bowels of compassion for a poor poetic sinner) of Dr. Gregory's remarks, and the delicacy of Professor Dalziel's taste, I shall ever revere.

I shall be in Edinburgh some time next month.

I have the honor to be, Sir,

Your highly obliged, and very humble Servant,

R. B.

[Dugald Stewart, born 1753, died 1828, was one of the most eloquent and influential teachers of his day in Europe. He occupied the chair of Moral Philosophy in Edinburgh for the space of twenty-five years.]

(1.) To Mr. Peter Hill.

[In this series of letters the order of Mr. Chambers's edition is followed. Mr. Hill, who had lately been chief assistant to Mr. Creech in Edinburgh, had now commenced business for himself in that city; and, as we learn from Mr. Chambers, had "the afterwards famous Archibald Constable as his apprentice.]

Mauchline, 18th July, 1788.

You injured me, my dear Sir, in your construction of the cause of my silence. From Ellisland in Nithsdale to Mauchline in Kyle is forty-and-five miles. *There*, a house a-building, and farm enclosures and improvements to tend; *here*, a new—not, indeed, so much a *new* as a *young* wife: Good God, Sir, could my dearest brother expect a regular correspondence from me! * * * I am certain that my liberal-minded and much-respected friend would have acquitted me, though I had obeyed to the very letter that famous statute among the irrevocable decrees of the Medes and Persians, not to ask petition, for forty days, of either God or man, save thee, O Queen, only!

I am highly obliged to you, my dearest Sir, for your kind, your elegant compliments on my becoming one of that most respectable, that most truly venerable corps, they who are, without a metaphor, the fathers of posterity * * * * *

Your book came safe, and I am going to trouble you with further commissions. I call it troubling you—because I want only books; the cheapest way, the best; so you may have to hunt for them in the evening auctions. I want Smollett's works, for the sake of his incomparable humour. I have already Roderick Random and Humphrey Clinker. Peregrine Pickle, Launcelot Greaves, and Ferdinand Count Fathom, I still want; but as I said, the veriest ordinary copies will serve me. I am nice only in the appearance of my poets. I forget the price of Cowper's poems, but, I believe, I must have them. I saw the other day proposals for a publication entitled "Banks's new and complete Christian's Family Bible," printed by C. Cooke, Paternoster-row, London. He promises at least to give in the work, I think it is three hundred and odd engravings, to which he has put the names of the first artists in London. You will know the character of the performance, as some numbers of it are published; and if it is really what it pretends to be, set me down as a subscriber, and send me the published numbers.

Let me hear from you your first leisure minute, and trust me you shall in future have no reason to complain of my silence. The dazzling perplexity of novelty will dissipate, and leave me to pursue my course in the quiet path of methodical routine.

R. B.

(2.) TO MR. PETER HILL.

Mauchline, 1st October, 1788.

I HAVE been here in this country about three days, and all that time my chief reading has been the "Address to Lochlomond" you were so obliging as to send to me. Were I impannelled one of the author's jury, to determine his criminality respecting the sin of poesy, my verdict should be "Guilty! A poet of nature's making!" It is an excellent method for improvement, and what I believe every poet does, to place some favorite classic author in his own walks of study and composition before him as a model. Though your author had not mentioned the name, I could have, at half a glance, guessed his model to be Thomson. Will my brother-poet forgive me, if I venture to hint that his imitation of that immortal bard is in two or three places rather more servile than such a genius as his required:—*e. g.*

"To soothe the maddening passions all to peace."

ADDRESS.

"To soothe the throbbing passions into peace."

THOMSON.

I think the "Address" is in simplicity, harmony, and elegance of versification, fully equal to the "Seasons." Like Thomson, too, he has looked into nature for himself; you meet with no copied description. One particular criticism I made at first reading; in no one instance has he said too much. He never flags in his progress, but, like a true poet of nature's making, kindles in his course. His beginning is simple and modest, as if distrustful of the strength of his pinion; only, I do not altogether like—

"Truth,
The soul of every song that's nobly great."

Fiction is the soul of many a song that is nobly great. Perhaps I am wrong; this may be but a prose criticism. Is not the phrase, in line 7, page 6, "Great lake," too much vulgarized by every-day language for so sublime a poem?

"Great mass of waters, theme for nobler song,"

is perhaps no emendation. His enumeration of a comparison with other lakes is at once harmonious and poetic. Every reader's ideas must sweep the

"Winding margin of an hundred miles."

The perspective that follows, mountains blue—the imprisoned billows beating in vain—the wooded isles—the digression on the yew-tree—"Ben-Lomond's lofty, cloud-envelop'd head," &c., are beautiful. A thunder-storm is a subject which has been often tried, yet our poet in his grand picture has interjected a circumstance, so far as I know, entirely original:—

"the gloom
Deep-seam'd with frequent streaks of moving fire."

In his preface to the storm, "the glens how dark between," is noble Highland landscape! The "rain ploughing the red mould," too, is beautifully fancied. "Ben-Lomond's lofty, pathless top," is a good expression; and the surrounding view from it is truly great: the

—"silver mist,
Beneath the beaming sun,"

is well described; and here he has contrived to enliven his poem with a little of that passion which bids fair, I think, to usurp the modern Muses altogether. I know not how far this episode is a beauty upon the whole, but the swain's wish to carry "some faint idea of the vision bright," to entertain her "partial listening ear," is a pretty thought. But in my opinion the most beautiful passages in the whole poem are the fowls crowding, in wintry frosts, to Lochlomond's "hospitable flood;" their wheeling round, their lighting, mixing, diving, &c.; and the glorious description of the sportsman. This last is equal to any thing in the "Seasons." The idea of "the floating tribes distant seen, far glistening to the moon," provoking his eye as he is obliged to leave them, is a noble ray of poetic genius. "The howling winds," the "hideous roar" of the "white cascades," are all in the same style.

I forget that while I am thus holding forth with the heedless warmth of an enthusiast, I am perhaps tiring you with nonsense. I must, however, mention that the last verse of the sixteenth page is one of the most elegant compliments I have ever seen. I must likewise notice that beautiful paragraph beginning, "The gleaming lake," &c. I dare not go into the particular beauties of the last two paragraphs, but they are admirably fine, and truly Ossianic.

I must beg your pardon for this lengthened scrawl. I had no idea of it when I began—I should like to know who the author is; but, whoever he be, please present him with my grateful thanks for the entertainment he has afforded me.*

A friend of mine desired me to commission for him two books, "Letters on the Religion essential to Man," a book you sent me before; and "The World Unmasked, or the Philosopher the Greatest Cheat." Send me them by the first opportunity. The Bible you sent me is truly elegant; I only wish it had been in two volumes.

R. B.

* [The poem, entitled *An Address to Loch-Lomond*, is said to be written by a gentleman, now one of the Masters of the High-School at Edinburgh, and the same who translated the beautiful story of the *Paria*, as published in the *Bee* of Dr. Anderson.—*Currie*. The author was Rev. Dr. Crieir, afterwards minister of Dalton, in Dumfriesshire.—*Chambers*.]

(3.) TO MR. PETER HILL.

[*Ellisland, March, 1789?*]

MY DEAR HILL,

I SHALL say nothing to your mad present*—you have so long and often been of important service to me, and I suppose you mean to go on conferring obligations until I shall not be able to lift up my face before you. In the mean time, as

Sir Roger de Coverley, because it happened to be a cold day in which he made his will, ordered his servants great coats for mourning, so, because I have been this week plagued with an indigestion, I have sent you by the carrier a fine old ewe-milk cheese.

Indigestion is the devil; nay, 'tis the devil and all. It besets a man in every one of his senses. I lose my appetite at the sight of successful knavery, and sicken to loathing at the noise and nonsense of self-important folly. When the hollow-hearted wretch takes me by the hand, the feeling spoils my dinner: the proud man's wine so offends my palate that it chokes me in the gullet; and the *pulverised*, feathered, pert coxbomb is so disgusting in my nostril that my stomach turns.

If ever you have any of these disagreeable sensations, let me prescribe for you patience and a bit of my cheese. I know that you are no niggard of your good things among your friends, and some of them are in much need of a slice. There, in my eye is our friend Smellie; a man positively of the first abilities and greatest strength of mind, as well as one of the best hearts and keenest wits that I have ever met with; when you see him, as, alas! he too is smarting at the pinch of distressful circumstances, aggravated by the sneer of contumelious greatness—a bit of my cheese alone will not cure him, but if you add a tankard of brown stout, and super-add a magnum of right Oporto, you will see his sorrow vanish like the morning mist before the summer sun.

Candlish, the earliest friend, except my only brother, that I have on earth, and one of the worthiest fellows that ever any man called by the name of friend, if a luncheon of my best cheese would help to rid him of some of his superabundant modesty, you would do well to give it him.

David, with his *Courant*,† comes, too, across my recollection, and I beg you will help him largely from the said ewe-milk cheese, to enable him to digest those damned bedaubing paragraphs with which he is eternally larding the lean characters of certain great men in a certain great town. I grant you the periods are very well turned; so, a fresh egg is a very good thing, but, when thrown at a man in a pillory, it does not at all improve his figure, not to mention the irreparable loss of the egg.

My facetious friend Dunbar I would wish also to be a partaker; not to digest his spleen, for that he laughs off, but to digest his last night's wine at the last field-day of the Crochallan corps.

Among our common friends I must not forget one of the dearest of them—Cunningham. The brutality, insolence, and selfishness of a world unworthy of having such a fellow as he is in it, I know sticks in his stomach, and if you can help him to anything that will make him a little easier on that score, it will be very obliging.

As to honest J[ohn] S[omerville], he is such a contented, happy man, that I know not what can annoy him, except, perhaps, he may not have got the better of a parcel of modest anecdotes which a certain poet gave him one night at supper, the last time the said poet was in town.

Though I have mentioned so many men of law, I shall have nothing to do with them professionally—the faculty are be-

yond my prescription. As to their clients, that is another thing; God knows they have much to digest.

The clergy I pass by; their profundity of erudition, and their liberality of sentiment; their total want of pride, and their detestation of hypocrisy, are so proverbially notorious as to place them far, far above either my praise or censure.

I was going to mention a man of worth whom I have the honor to call friend, the Laird of Craigdarroch; but I have spoken to the landlord of the King's Arms Inn here, to have at the next county meeting a large ewe-milk cheese on the table, for the benefit of the Dumfries-shire Whigs, to enable them to digest the Duke of Queensberry's late political conduct.

I have just this moment an opportunity of a private hand to Edinburgh, as perhaps you would not digest double postage.

So God bless you!

R. B.

* [Mr. Hill had sent the Poet a present of Books.—*Chambers*.]

† [Mr. David Ramsay, of *Edinburgh Evening Courant*: see also Letter (4).]

(4.)

TO MR. PETER HILL.

Ellisland, 2nd April, 1789.

I WILL make no excuses, my dear Bibliopolus, (God forgive me for murdering language!) that I have sat down to write you on this vile paper, stained with the sanguinary scores of "thae curs'd horse-leeches o' the Excise."

It is economy, Sir; it is that cardinal virtue, prudence: so I beg you will sit down, and either compose or borrow a panegyric. If you are going to borrow, apply to our friend Ramsay for the assistance of the author of the pretty little buttering paragraphs of eulogium on your thrice-honored, and never-enough-to-be-praised, MAGISTRACY—how they hunt down a housebreaker with the sanguinary perseverance of a bloodhound—how they out-do a terrier in a badger-hole in unearthing a resetter of stolen goods—how they steal on a thoughtless troop of night-nymphs as a spaniel winds the unsuspecting covey—or how they riot over a ravaged * * as a cat does o'er a plundered mouse-nest—how they new-vamp old churches, aiming at appearances of piety; plan squares and colleges, to pass for men of taste and learning, &c., &c., &c.; while Old Edinburgh, like the doting mother of a parcel of rakehell prodigals, may sing *Hoolly and fairly*, or cry *Wae's me that e'er I saw ye!* but still must put her hand in her pocket, and pay whatever scores the young dogs think proper to contract.

I was going to say—but this parenthesis has put me out of breath—that you should get that manufacturer of the tinselled crockery of magistratual reputations, who makes so distinguished and distinguishing a figure in the *Evening Courant*, to compose, or rather to compound, something very clever on my remarkable frugality; that I write to one of my most esteemed friends on this wretched paper, which was originally intended for the venal fist of some drunken exciseman, to take dirty notes in a miserable vault of an ale-cellar.

O Frugality! thou mother of ten thousand blessings—thou cook of fat beef and dainty greens!—thou manufacturer of warm Shetland hose, and comfortable surtouts!—thou old housewife, darning thy decayed stockings with thy ancient spectacles on thy aged nose!—lead me, hand me in thy clutching palsied fist, up those heights, and through those thickets, hitherto inaccessible and impervious to my anxious, weary feet:—not those Parnassian crags, bleak and barren, where the hungry worshippers of fame are breathless clambering, hanging between heaven and hell; but those glittering cliffs of Potosi, where the all-sufficient, all powerful deity, Wealth, holds his immediate court of joys and pleasures; where the sunny exposure of Plenty, and the hot-walls of Profusion, produce those blissful fruits of Luxury, exotics in this world, and natives of Paradise!—Thou withered sybil, my sage conductress, usher me into thy refulgent, adored presence!—The power, splendid and potent as he now is, was once the puling nursing of thy faithful care and tender arms! Call me thy son, thy cousin, thy kinsman, or favourite, and adjure the god by the scenes of his infant years, no longer to repulse me as a stranger or an alien, but to favour me with his peculiar countenance and protection?—He daily bestows his greatest kindness on the undeserving and the worthless—assure him, that I bring ample documents of meritorious demerits! Pledge yourself for me, that, for the glorious cause of LUCRE, I will do any thing, be any thing—but the horse-leech of private oppression, or the vulture of public robbery!

But to descend from heroics—what, in the name of all * * at once, have you done with my trunk? Please let me have it by the first carrier.

I want a Shakspeare: let me know what plays your used copy of Bell's Shakspeare wants. I want likewise an English dictionary—Johnson's, I suppose, is best. In these and all my *prose* commissions, the cheapest is always the best for me. There is a small debt of honour that I owe Mr. Robert Cleghorn, in Saughton Mills, my worthy friend, and your well-wisher. Please give him, and urge him to take it, the first time you see him, ten shillings' worth of any thing you have to sell, and place it to my account.

The library scheme that I mentioned to you is already begun, under the direction of Captain Riddel and me. There is another in emulation of it going on at Closeburn, under the auspices of Mr. Monteith of Closeburn, which will be on a greater scale than ours. I have, likewise, secured it for you. Captain Riddel gave his infant society a great many of his old books, else I had written you on that subject; but, one of these days, I shall trouble you with a commission for The Monkland Friendly Society. A copy of The Spectator, Mirror, and Lounger, Man of Feeling, Man of the World, Guthrie's Geographical Grammar, with some religious pieces will likely be our first order.*

When I grow richer, I will write to you on gilt-post, to make amends for this sheet. At present, every guinea has a five-guinea errand with, my dear Sir,

Your faithful, poor, but honest friend,

R. B.

(5.)

TO MR. PETER HILL.

Ellisland, 2nd Feb., 1790.

No! I will not say one word about apologies or excuses for not writing.—I am a poor, rascally gauger, condemned to gallop at least 200 miles every week to inspect dirty ponds and yeasty barrels, and where can I find time to write to, or importance to interest anybody? The upbraidings of my conscience, nay, the upbraidings of my wife, have persecuted me on your account these two or three months past.—I wish to God I was a great man, that my correspondence might throw light upon you, to let the world see what you really are; and then I would make your fortune without putting my hand in my pocket for you, which, like all other great men, I suppose I would avoid as much as possible. What are you doing, and how are you doing? Have you lately seen any of my few friends? What is become of the BOROUGH REFORM, or how is the fate of my poor namesake, Mademoiselle Burns, decided? Which of their grave lordships can lay his hand on his heart, and say that he has not taken advantage of such frailty? * * * O man! but for thee and thy selfish appetites and dishonest artifices, that beauteous form, and that once innocent and still ingenuous mind, might have shone conspicuous and lovely in the faithful wife and the affectionate mother; and shall the unfortunate sacrifice to thy pleasures have no claim on thy humanity! * * *

I saw lately in a Review some extracts from a new poem, called the Village Curate; send it me. I want likewise a cheap copy of The World. Mr. Armstrong, the young poet, who does me the honor to mention me so kindly in his works, please give him my best thanks for the copy of his book. I shall write him my first leisure hour. I like his poetry much, but I think his style in prose quite astonishing.

What is become of that veteran in genius, wit, and ———, Smellie, and his book? Give him my compliments. Does Mr. Graham of Gartmore ever enter your shop now? He is the noblest instance of great talents, great fortune, and great worth that ever I saw in conjunction. Remember me to Mrs. Hill; and believe me to be, my dear Sir, ever yours,

R. B.

(6.)

TO MR. PETER HILL.

Ellisland, 2nd March, 1790.

At a late meeting of the Monkland Friendly Society, it was resolved to augment their library by the following books, which you are to send us as soon as possible:—The Mirror, The Lounger, Man of Feeling, Man of the World (these, for my own sake, I wish to have by the first carrier); Knox's History of the Reformation; Rae's History of the Rebellion in 1715; any good History of the Rebellion in 1745; A Display of the Secession Act and Testimony, by Mr. Gibb; Hervey's Meditations; Beveridge's Thoughts; and another copy of Watson's Body of Divinity. This last heavy performance is so much admired by many of our members, that they will not be content with one copy.

* [Compare letter to Sir J. Sinclair.]

I wrote to Mr. A. Masterton three or four months ago, to pay some money he owed me into your hands, and lately I wrote to you to the same purpose, but I have heard from neither one nor other of you.

In addition to the books I commissioned in my last, I want very much, An Index to the Excise Laws, or an Abridgment of all the Statutes now in force, relative to the Excise: by Jellinger Symons. I want three copies of this book; if it is now to be had, cheap or dear, get it for me. An honest country neighbour of mine wants too a Family Bible, the larger the better; but second-handed, for he does not chuse to give above ten shillings for the book. I want likewise for myself, as you can pick them up, second-handed or cheap copies of Otway's Dramatic Works, Ben Jonson's, Dryden's, Congreve's, Wycherley's, Vanbrugh's, Cibber's, or any dramatic works of the more modern Macklin, Garrick, Foote, Colman, or Sheridan. A good copy, too, of Molière in French I much want. Any other good dramatic authors in that language I want also; but comic authors chiefly, though I should wish to have Racine, Corneille, and Voltaire too. I am in no hurry for all, or any of these, but if you accidentally meet with them very cheap, get them for me.

And now, to quit the dry walk of business, how do you do, my dear friend? and how is Mrs. Hill? I trust, if now and then not so *elegantly* handsome, at least as amiable, and sings as divinely as ever. My good wife too has a charming "wood-note wild;" now could we four get anyway snugly together in a corner of the New Jerusalem (remember, I bespeak your company there), you and I, though Heaven knows we are no singers, &c.

I am out of all patience with this vile world for one thing. Mankind are by nature benevolent creatures, except in a few scoundrelly instances. I do not think that avarice of the good things we chance to have is born with us; but we are placed here amid so much nakedness and hunger, and poverty and want, that we are under a cursed necessity of studying selfishness, in order that we may EXIST! Still there are, in every age, a few souls that all the wants and woes of life cannot debase to selfishness, or even to the necessary alloy of caution and prudence. If ever I am in danger of vanity, it is when I contemplate myself on this side of my disposition and character. God knows I am no saint; I have a whole host of follies and sins to answer for; but if I could, and I believe I do it as far as I can, I would wipe away all tears from all eyes. Even the knaves who have injured me, I would oblige them; though, to tell the truth, it would be more out of vengeance, to shew them that I was independent of and above them, than out of the overflowings of my benevolence. Adieu!

R. B.

five or six months! I can as little write good things as apologies to the man I owe money to. O the supreme curse of making three guineas do the business of five! Not all the labours of Hercules; not all the Hebrews' three centuries of Egyptian bondage, were such an insuperable business, such an infernal task!! Poverty! thou half-sister of death, thou cousin-german of hell! where shall I find force of execration equal to the amplitude of thy demerits? Oppressed by thee, the venerable ancient, grown hoary in the practice of every virtue, laden with years and wretchedness, implores a little—little aid to support his existence, from a stony-hearted son of Mammon, whose sun of prosperity never knew a cloud; and is by him denied and insulted. Oppressed by thee, the man of sentiment, whose heart glows with independence, and melts with sensibility, inly pines under the neglect, or writhes, in bitterness of soul, under the contumely of arrogant, unfeeling wealth. Oppressed by thee, the son of Genius, whose ill-starred ambition plants him at the tables of the fashionable and polite, must see, in suffering silence, his remark neglected, and his person despised, while shallow greatness, in his idiot attempts at wit, shall meet with countenance and applause. Nor is it only the family of Worth that have reason to complain of thee: the children of Folly and Vice, though in common with thee the offspring of Evil, smart equally under thy rod. Owing to thee, the man of unfortunate disposition and neglected education is condemned as a fool for his dissipation; despised and shunned as a needy wretch when his follies, as usual, bring him to want; and when his unprincipled necessities drive him to dishonest practices, he is abhorred as a miscreant, and perishes by the justice of his country. But far otherwise is the lot of the man of family and fortune. *His* early follies and extravagances are spirit and fire; *his* consequent wants are the embarrassments of an honest fellow; and when, to remedy the matter, he has gained a legal commission to plunder distant provinces, or massacre peaceful nations, he returns, perhaps, laden with the spoils of rapine and murder; lives wicked and respected, and dies a scoundrel and a lord. Nay, worst of all, alas for helpless woman! the needy prostitute, who has shivered at the corner of the street, waiting to earn the wages of casual prostitution, is left neglected and insulted, ridden down by the chariot wheels of the coroneted RIP, hurrying on to the guilty assignation—she who, without the same necessities to plead, riots nightly in the same guilty trade.

Well! divines may say of it what they please; but execration is to the mind what phlebotomy is to the body; the vital sluices of both are wonderfully relieved by their respective evacuations.

R. B.

* [Mr. Chambers mentions that the sum of *three* guineas is placed to Burns's credit in Mr. Hill's books of this date, and suggests that *two* had been written in our Author's letter by mistake. This is very likely to be the case: compare next sentence, in which he laments that *three* guineas cannot do the work of five.]

(7.) TO MR. PETER HILL.

Ellisland, 17th January, 1791.

TAKE these two guineas,* and place them over against that damned account of yours, which has gagged my mouth these

(8.) TO MR. PETER HILL.

[*Spring? 1791.*]

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I was never more unfit for writing. A poor devil, nailed to an elbow-chair, writhing in anguish with a bruised leg laid on a stool before him, is in a fine situation truly for saying bright things.

I may perhaps see you about Martinmas. I have sold to my landlord the lease of my farm, and as I roup off everything then, I have a mind to take a week's excursion to see old acquaintance. At all events, you may reckon on [payment of] your account about that time. So much for business. I do not know if I ever informed you that I am now ranked on the list as a supervisor, and I have pretty good reason to believe that I shall soon be called out to employment. The appointment is worth from one to two hundred a year, according to the place of the country in which one is settled. I have not been so lucky in my farming. Mr. Miller's kindness has been just such another as Creech's was:

"His meddling vanity, a busy fiend,
Still making work his selfish craft must mend."

By the way, I have taken vengeance on Creech. He wrote me a fine, fair letter, telling me that he was going to print a third edition; and as he had a brother's care of my fame, he wished to add every new thing I have written since, and I should be amply rewarded with—a copy or two to present to my friends. He has sent me a copy of the last edition to correct, &c. But I have as yet taken no notice of it; and I hear he has published without me.* You know, and all my friends know, that I do not value money; but I owed the gentleman a debt, which I am happy to have it in my power to repay.

Farewell, and prosperity attend all your undertakings! I shall try, if my unlucky limb would give me a little ease, to write you a letter a little better worth reading.

R. B.

* [The reader's attention is directed to this statement, as one among many proofs how editions of our Author, with or without editorial revision, were sometimes printed. There seems to be some little confusion here about dates, which it is not easy to rectify. The farm was not actually given up till much later—November 19th—but there may have been a private agreement to that effect at this date. What may be called Creech's *third* edition was published in July, 1790; and the next edition, that containing the new pieces, in April, 1793. One of the previous editions, therefore, the one in which the London publishers had an interest, may have been omitted by our Author in this calculation. In any case, there had been manifestly a long interval of silence between him and Creech.]

(9.) TO [MR. PETER HILL.]

[*Dumfries, 13th July, 1791.*]

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I TAKE Glenriddel's kind offer of a corner for a postscript to you, though I have nothing particular to tell you. It

is with the greatest pleasure I learn from all hands, and particularly from your warm friend and patron, the Laird here, that you are going on, spreading and thriving like the palm-tree that shades the fragrant vale in the Holy Land of the Prophet. May the richest juices from beneath, and the dews of heaven from above, foster your root and refresh your branches, until you be as conspicuous among your fellows as the stately Goliath towering over the little pigmy Philistines around him! Amen, so be it!!!

R. B.

(10.) TO MR. PETER HILL.

[*Dumfries, 5th Feb., 1792.*]

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I SEND you by the bearer, Mr. Clarke, a particular friend of mine, six pounds and a shilling, which you will dispose of as follows:—five pounds ten shillings per account I owe Mr. R. Burn, architect, for erecting the stone over the grave of poor Fergusson. He was two years in erecting it after I had commissioned him for it, and I have been two years in paying him, after he sent me his account; so he and I are quits. He had the *hardiesse* to ask me interest on the sum; but, considering that the money was due by one poet for putting a tombstone over another, he may, with grateful surprise, thank Heaven that he ever saw a farthing of it.

With the remainder of the money, pay yourself for the "Office of a Messenger" that I bought of you; and send me by Mr. Clarke a note of its price. Send me, likewise, the fifth volume of the *Observer* by Mr. Clarke; and if any money remain, let it stand to account.

My best compliments to Mrs. Hill.

I sent you a maukin by last week's Fly, which I hope you received. Yours, most sincerely,

R. B.

(11.) TO MR. PETER HILL.

[*Dumfries, May, 1793?*]

I HOPE and trust that this unlucky blast which has overturned so many, and many worthy characters, who, four months ago, little dreaded any such thing—will spare my friend.

O may the wrath and curse of all mankind haunt and harass these turbulent, unprincipled miscreants who have involved a People in this ruinous business!

I have not a moment more. Blessed be he that blesteth

* P

thee, and cursed be he that curseth thee, and the wretch whose envious malice would injure thee, may the Giver of every good and perfect gift say unto him, "Thou shalt not prosper!"

R. B.

[Compare this and following letter with letter (1) to Captain John Hamilton, in General Correspondence.]

(12.) TO MR. PETER HILL.

[*Dumfries, July, 1793?*]

MY DEAR SIR,

* * * Now that business is over, how are you, and how do you weather this accursed time? God only knows what will be the consequence; but in the meantime the country, at least in our part of it, is still progressive to the devil. For my part, "I jouk, and let the jaw flee o'er." As my hopes in this world are but slender, I am turning rapidly devotee, in the prospect of sharing largely in the world to come.

How is old sinful Smellie coming on? Is there any talk of his second volume? If you meet with my much-valued old friend, Colonel Dunbar, of the Crochallan Fencibles, remember me most affectionately to him. Alas! not unfrequently, when my heart is in a wandering humour, I live past scenes over again. To my mind's eye, you, Dunbar, Cleghorn, Cunningham, &c., present their friendly phiz[es], and my bosom aches with tender recollections. Adieu!

R. B.

(13.) TO MR. PETER HILL.

[*Dumfries, end of October, 1794?*]

MY DEAR HILL,

By a carrier of yesterday, Henry Osborn by name, I sent you a kippered salmon, which I trust you will duly receive, and which I also trust will give you many a toothful of satisfaction. If you have the confidence to say that there is anything of the kind in all your great city superior to this in true kipper relish and flavour, I will be revenged by—not sending you another next season. In return, the first party of friends that dine with you—provided that your fellow-travellers and my trusty and well-beloved veterans in intimacy, Messrs Ramsay and Cameron be of the party—about that time in the afternoon when a relish or devil becomes grateful, give them two or three slices of the kipper, and drink a bumper to your friends in Dumfries. Moreover, by last Saturday's fly, I sent you a hare, which I hope came, and carriage-free, safe to your hospitable mansion and social table. So much for business.

How do you like the following pastoral, which I wrote the other day for a tune that I daresay you well know?

[Here follows song—"Ca' the Yowes to the Knowes."]

And how do you like the following?—

ON SEEING MRS. KEMBLE IN YARICO.

Kemble, thou cur'st my unbelief
Of Moses and his rod;
At Yarico's sweet notes of grief
The rock with tears had flowed.

Or this?—

ON W—— R——, ESQ.

So vile was poor Wat, such a miscreant slave,
That the worms even damned him when laid in his grave;
'In his skull there is famine!' a starved reptile cries;
'And his heart it is poison!' another replies.

My best good wishes to Mrs. Hill; and believe me to be ever yours,

R. BURNS.*

* [This letter appeared in the *Knickerbocker* (New York magazine) for September, 1848.—*Chambers*.]

To the Rev. G. Laurie,

NEWMILLS, NEAR KILMARNOCK.

Edinburgh, Feb. 5, 1787.

REVEREND AND DEAR SIR,

WHEN I look at the date of your kind letter, my heart reproaches me severely with ingratitude in neglecting so long to answer it. I will not trouble you with any account, by way of apology, of my hurried life and distracted attention; do me the justice to believe that my delay by no means proceeded from want of respect. I feel, and ever shall feel for you the mingled sentiments of esteem for a friend, and reverence for a father.

I thank you, Sir, with all my soul for your friendly hints, though I do not need them so much as my friends are apt to imagine. You are dazzled with newspaper accounts and distant reports; but, in reality, I have no great temptation to be intoxicated with the cup of prosperity. Novelty may attract the attention of mankind awhile; to it I owe my present *éclat*; but I see the time not far distant when the popular tide which has borne me to a height of which I am, perhaps, unworthy, shall recede with silent celerity, and leave me a barren waste of sand, to descend at my leisure to my former station. I do not say this in the affectation of modesty; I see the consequence is unavoidable, and am prepared for it. I had been at a good deal of pains to form a just, impartial estimate of my intellectual powers before I came here; I have not added, since I came to Edinburgh, anything to the account; and I trust I shall take every

atom of it back to my shades, the coverts of my unnoticed, early years.

In Dr. Blacklock, whom I see very often, I have found what I would have expected in our friend, a clear head and an excellent heart.

By far the most agreeable hours I spend in Edinburgh must be placed to the account of Miss Laurie and her piano-forte. I cannot help repeating to you and Mrs. Laurie a compliment that Mr. Mackenzie, the celebrated "Man of Feeling," paid to Miss Laurie the other night, at the concert. I had come in at the interlude, and sat down by him till I saw Miss Laurie in a seat not very far distant, and went up to pay my respects to her. On my return to Mr. Mackenzie, he asked me who she was; I told him 'twas the daughter of a reverend friend of mine in the west country. He returned, there was something very striking, to his idea, in her appearance. On my desiring to know what it was, he was pleased to say, "She has a great deal of the elegance of a well-bred lady about her, with all the sweet simplicity of a country girl."

My compliments to all the happy inmates of St. Margaret's.

I am, my dear Sir,

Yours most gratefully,

R. B.

[Our readers need hardly be reminded that this estimable gentleman was the friend who first introduced our Author's name and works to the notice of Dr. Blacklock—with what strange consequences of success the world knows.]

To the Rev. Dr. Hugh Blair.

Lawn-Market, Edinburgh, 3rd May, 1787.

REVEREND AND MUCH-RESPECTED SIR,

I LEAVE Edinburgh to-morrow morning, but could not go without troubling you with half a line, sincerely to thank you for the kindness, patronage, and friendship you have shown me. I often felt the embarrassment of my singular situation; drawn forth from the veriest shades of life to the glare of remark; and honored by the notice of those illustrious names of my country whose works, while they are applauded to the end of time, will ever instruct and mend the heart. However the meteor-like novelty of my appearance in the world might attract notice, and honor me with the acquaintance of the permanent lights of genius and literature, those who are truly benefactors of the immortal nature of man, I knew very well that my utmost merit was far unequal to the task of preserving that character when once the novelty was over: I have made up my mind that abuse, or almost even neglect, will not surprise me in my quarters.

I have sent you a proof impression of Beugo's work for me, done on Indian paper, as a trifling but sincere testimony with what heart-warm gratitude I am, &c.,

R. B.

[Hugh Blair, born at Edinburgh, 1718, died 1793, minister of Lady Yester's Church and professor of rhetoric in the University of that city, was long esteemed the most eloquent and accomplished lecturer and preacher of his day in Great Britain. His sermons were translated, as models of their kind, into almost every language in Europe.]

To Bishop Geddes.

Ellisland, 3rd Feb., 1789.

VENERABLE FATHER,

AS I am conscious that wherever I am, you do me the honor to interest yourself in my welfare, it gives me pleasure to inform you that I am here at last, stationary in the serious business of life, and have now not only the retired leisure, but the hearty inclination, to attend to those great and important questions—what I am? where I am? and for what I am destined?

In that first concern, the conduct of the man, there was ever but one side on which I was habitually blameable, and there I have secured myself in the way pointed out by Nature and Nature's GOD. I was sensible that to so helpless a creature as a poor poet, a wife and family were incumbrances, which a species of prudence would bid him shun; but when the alternative was, being at eternal warfare with myself, on account of habitual follies, to give them no worse name, which no general example, no licentious wit, no sophistical infidelity would, to me, ever justify, I must have been a fool to have hesitated, and a madman to have made another choice. Besides, I had in "my Jean" a long and much loved fellow-creature's happiness or misery among my hands, and who could trifle with such a deposit?

In the affair of a livelihood, I think myself tolerably secure; I have good hopes of my farm, but should they fail, I have an Excise commission, which, on my simple petition, will at any time procure me bread. There is a certain stigma affixed to the character of an Excise officer, but I do not pretend to borrow honor from my profession; and though the salary be comparatively small, it is luxury to anything that the first twenty-five years of my life taught me to expect.

Thus, with a rational aim and method in life, you may easily guess, my reverend and much-honoured friend, that my characteristic trade is not forgotten. I am, if possible, more than ever an enthusiast to the Muses. I am determined to study man and nature, and in that view incessantly; and to try if the ripening and corrections of years can enable me to produce something worth preserving.

You will see in your book, which I beg your pardon for detaining so long, that I have been tuning my lyre on the banks of Nith. Some large poetic plans that are floating in my imagination, or partly put in execution, I shall impart to you when I have the pleasure of meeting with you; which, if you are then in Edinburgh, I shall have about the beginning of March.

That acquaintance, worthy Sir, with which you were pleased to honor me, you must still allow me to challenge; for with whatever unconcern I give up my transient connexion with the merely great, those self-important beings

whose intrinsic * * * [con]cealed under the accidental advantages of their * * * I cannot lose the patronizing notice of the learned and good, without the bitterest regret.

R. B.

[Bishop Alexander Geddes, of the Roman Catholic Church, a man of singular character and original genius, was born in Banffshire, of humble parentage, in 1737, and died in London, 1802. The 'book' here referred to was a copy of our Author's own poems, into which he had transcribed some additional verses. Bishop Geddes had a high admiration of, and fatherly regard for, Robert Burns.]

To the Rev. Peter Carfrae.

[*Ellisland, March, 1789?*]

REV. SIR,

I do not recollect that I have ever felt a severer pang of shame, than on looking at the date of your obliging letter which accompanied Mr. Mylne's poem.

I am much to blame; the honor Mr. Mylne has done me, greatly enhanced in its value by the endearing, though melancholy circumstance, of its being the last production of his muse, deserved a better return.

I have, as you hint, thought of sending a copy of the poem to some periodical publication; but, on second thoughts, I am afraid, that in the present case, it would be an improper step. My success, perhaps as much accidental as merited, has brought an inundation of nonsense under the name of Scottish poetry. Subscription-bills for Scottish poems have so dunned, and daily do dun the public, that the very name is in danger of contempt. For these reasons, if publishing any of Mr. Mylne's poems in a magazine, &c., be at all prudent, in my opinion it certainly should not be a Scottish poem. The profits of the labours of a man of genius are, I hope, as honourable as any profits whatever; and Mr. Mylne's relations are most justly entitled to that honest harvest which fate has denied himself to reap. But let the friends of Mr. Mylne's fame (among whom I crave the honor of ranking myself) always keep in eye his respectability as a man and as a poet, and take no measure that, before the world knows anything about him, would risk his name and character being classed with the fools of the times.

I have, Sir, some experience of publishing; and the way in which I would proceed with Mr. Mylne's poems is this:—I will publish, in two or three English and Scottish public papers, any one of his English poems which should, by private judges, be thought the most excellent, and mention it at the same time as one of the productions of a Lothian farmer of respectable character, lately deceased, whose poems his friends had it in idea to publish soon by subscription, for the sake of his numerous family:—not in pity to that family, but in justice to what his friends think the poetic merits of the deceased; and to secure in the most effectual manner, to those tender connexions, whose right it is, the pecuniary reward of those merits.*

R. B.

* [A volume of these poems, including two tragedies, was published by Creech in 1790. Rev. Mr. Carfrae seems to have been a friend of Mrs. Dunlop's—compare letter (20) to her.]

To Sir John Sinclair.

[1791.]

SIR,

THE following circumstance has, I believe, been omitted in the statistical account transmitted to you of the parish of Dunscore, in Nithsdale. I beg leave to send it to you, because it is new, and may be useful. How far it is deserving of a place in your patriotic publication, you are the best judge.

To store the minds of the lower classes with useful knowledge is certainly of very great importance, both to them as individuals and to society at large. Giving them a turn for reading and reflection is giving them a source of innocent and laudable amusement; and besides, raises them to a more dignified degree in the scale of rationality. Impressed with this idea, a gentleman in this parish, Robert Riddel, Esq., of Glenriddel, set on foot a species of circulating library, on a plan so simple as to be practicable in any corner of the country; and so useful, as to deserve the notice of every country gentleman, who thinks the improvement of that part of his own species, whom chance has thrown into the humble walks of the peasant and the artizan, a matter worthy of his attention.

Mr. Riddel got a number of his own tenants and farming neighbours to form themselves into a society, for the purpose of having a library among themselves. They entered into a legal engagement to abide by it for three years; with a saving clause or two, in case of removal to a distance, or of death. Each member at his entry paid five shillings; and at each of their meetings, which were held every fourth Saturday, sixpence more. With their entry-money, and the credit which they took on the faith of their future funds, they laid in a tolerable stock of books at the commencement. What authors they were to purchase, was always decided by the majority. At every meeting, all the books, under certain fines and forfeitures, by way of penalty, were to be produced; and the members had their choice of the volumes in rotation. He whose name stood for that night first on the list had his choice of what volume he pleased, in the whole collection; the second had his choice after the first; the third, after the second; and so on, to the last. At next meeting, he who had been first on the list at the preceding meeting was last at this; he who had been second was first; and so on, through the whole three years. At the expiration of the engagement the books were sold by auction, but only among the members themselves; and each man had his share of the common stock, in money or in books, as he chose to be a purchaser or not.

At the breaking up of this little society, which was formed under Mr. Riddel's patronage, what with benefactions of books from him, and what with their own purchases, they had collected together upwards of one hundred and fifty volumes. It will easily be guessed that a good deal of trash would be bought. Among the books, however, of this little library were *Blair's Sermons*, *Robertson's History of Scotland*, *Hume's History of the Stewarts*, *The Spectator*, *Idler*,

Adventurer, Mirror, Lounger, Observer, Man of Feeling, Man of the World, Chrysal, Don Quixote, Joseph Andrews, &c. A peasant who can read and enjoy such books is certainly a much superior being to his neighbour who perhaps stalks beside his team, very little removed, except in shape, from the brutes he drives.

Wishing your patriotic exertions their so much merited success,

I am, Sir,

Your humble servant,

A PEASANT.

[This letter (which seems to have been intended as a rebuke to the minister of the parish for neglect of the library) was forwarded with a brief accompanying note by Captain Riddel to Sir John Sinclair, explaining our Author's valuable services "as treasurer, librarian, and censor to this little society"—and both letters appear in third volume of Sir John's celebrated *Statistical Account of Scotland*. Compare letters to P. Hill, with reference to books ordered.]

To Charles Sharpe, Esq.,

OF HODDAM.

[ENCLOSING A BALLAD.]

[1790 or 1791.]

It is true, Sir, you are a gentleman of rank and fortune, and I am a poor devil; you are a feather in the cap of society, and I am a very hobnail in his shoes; yet I have the honor to belong to the same family with you, and on that score I now address you. You will perhaps suspect that I am going to claim affinity with the ancient and honourable house of Kirkpatrick. No, no, Sir: I cannot indeed be properly said to belong to any house, or even any province or kingdom; as my mother, who for many years was spouse to a marching regiment, gave me into this bad world, aboard the packet-boat, somewhere between Donaghadee and Portpatrick. By our common family, I mean, Sir, the family of the Muses. I am a fiddler, and a poet; and you, I am told, play an exquisite violin, and have a standard taste in the *Belles Lettres*. The other day, a brother-catgut gave me a charming Scots air of your composition. If I was pleased with the tune, I was in raptures with the title you have given it; and taking up the idea I have spun it into the three stanzas enclosed. Will you allow me, Sir, to present you them, as the dearest offering that a misbegotten son of Poverty and Rhyme has to give? I have a longing to take you by the hand and unburthen my heart by saying, "Sir, I honor you as a man who supports the dignity of human nature, amid an age when frivolity and avarice have, between them, debased us below the brutes that perish!" But, alas! Sir, to me you are unapproachable. It is true, the Muses baptized me in Castalian streams, but the thoughtless gipsies forgot to give me a name. As the sex have served many a good fellow, the Nine have given me a great deal of pleasure, but, bewitching jades! they have beggared me. Would they but spare me a little of their cast-linen! were it only to put it in my power to say that

I have a shirt on my back! But the idle wenches, like Solomon's lilies, "they toil not, neither do they spin;" so I must e'en continue to tie my remnant of a cravat, like the hangman's rope, round my naked throat, and coax my galligaskins to keep together their many-coloured fragments. As to the affair of shoes, I have given that up. My pilgrimages in my ballad-trade, from town to town, and on your stony-hearted turnpikes too, are what not even the hide of Job's Behemoth could bear. The coat on my back is no more: I shall not speak evil of the dead. It would be equally unhandsome and ungrateful to find fault with my old surtout, which so kindly supplies and conceals the want of that coat. My hat indeed is a great favourite; and though I got it literally for an old song, I would not exchange it for the best beaver in Britain. I was, during several years, a kind of fac-totum servant to a country clergyman, where I pickt up a good many scraps of learning, particularly in some branches of the mathematics. Whenever I feel inclined to rest myself on my way, I take my seat under a hedge, laying my poetic wallet on the one side, and my fiddle-case on the other, and placing my hat between my legs, I can, by means of its brim, or rather brims, go through the whole doctrine of the conic sections.

However, Sir, don't let me mislead you, as if I would interest your pity. Fortune has so much forsaken me, that she has taught me to live without her; and amid all my rags and poverty, I am as independent, and much more happy, than a monarch of the world. According to the hackneyed metaphor, I value the several actors in the great drama of life, simply as they act their parts. I can look on a worthless fellow of a duke with unqualified contempt, and can regard an honest scavenger with sincere respect. As you, Sir, go through your rôle with such distinguished merit, permit me to make one in the chorus of universal applause, and assure you that with the highest respect,

I have the honor to be, &c.

JOHNNY FAA.

[All further trace of literary correspondence between our Author and this accomplished but somewhat eccentric gentleman, to whom he thus introduced himself in quaint enough character, seems to be lost. There is indeed in Mr. Chambers's edition (vol. III. p. 195) some account of a masonic apron, on the authority of Mr. John Ramsay (author of the *Woodnotes of a Wanderer*), understood by him to have been a gift from Sharpe to Burns, and which bore an inscription under the over-lap to that effect—thus quoted by Mr. Chambers:—

CHARLES SHARPE, of Hotham,
TO
RABBIE BURNS.

DUMFRIES, Dec. 12, 1791.

This alleged memorial of their friendship, however, has been subjected to examination by Thomas Thorburn, Esq., Ryedale, Dumfries,—who estimates its value at a shilling or eightpence, exclusive of the lettering, which is good; and disproves its authenticity in a communication of considerable length, evidencing minute acquaintance with the whole subject, in *Dumfries Courier*, May 17, 1853. Among other arguments, he states that "the handwriting is not that of the Laird of Hoddam, nor of the illustrious 'Rabbie;' and it is abundantly obvious that neither of them would have been guilty of so gross a solecism as to spell Mr. Sharpe's name without an 'e' any more than to call his patrimonial property Hotham instead of Hoddam, by which it is universally known and recognised. The ink is not that of 1791, though of course it might have been refreshed or renewed." From this it appears that Mr. Ramsay or Mr. Chambers had not examined with sufficient care the actual inscription when transcribing it for the press. According to Mr. Thorburn, the writing reads as follows:—

CHARLES SHARP of Hotham,
TO
RABBIE BURNS.

Dumfries, December 12, 1791.

which, beside the style of the handwriting, goes far to prove that it was not a genuine inscription at all. He further demonstrates, from entries in the Lodge Book, that Sharpe and Burns could hardly ever have met as masons; so that all ground for imagining an intercourse of that kind, however natural it might seem, is removed. We are much indebted to Mr. Thorburn for his kindness in directing our attention to this and to some other points of interest, to which hereafter we shall have occasion to refer.]

To Dr. Anderson.

[FRAGMENT.]

[1790.]

SIR,

I AM much indebted to my worthy friend, Dr. Blacklock, for introducing me to a gentleman of Dr. Anderson's celebrity; but when you do me the honor to ask my assistance in your proposed publication, alas! Sir, you might as well think to cheapen a little honesty at the sign of an advocate's wig, or humility under the Geneva band. I am a miserable hurried devil, worn to the marrow in the friction of holding the noses of the poor publicans to the grindstone of the excise! and, like Milton's Satan, for private reasons, am forced

"To do what yet though damn'd I would abhor,"

—and, except a couplet or two of honest execration * * *

[We adopt Mr. Chambers's order in this letter, who seems correctly to have settled its date, and some other particulars respecting it, which had been misstated by Currie and Cromek. Dr. James Anderson was a celebrated writer on agriculture, also on miscellaneous subjects. The *Bee* began in December, 1790. Blacklock addressed a playful poetical epistle to Burns in September of that year, entreating his assistance as a contributor. The above letter manifestly refers to this subject.]

To William Tytler, Esq.,

OF WOODHOUSELEE.*

Lawn-Market, August, 1790.

SIR,

ENCLOSED I have sent you a sample of the old pieces that are still to be found among our peasantry in the west. I had once a great many of these fragments, and some of these here entire; but as I had no idea then that any body cared for them, I have forgotten them. I invariably hold it sacrilege to add anything of my own to help out with the shattered wrecks of these venerable old compositions; but they have many, various readings. If you have not seen these before, I know they will flatter your true old-style Caledonian feelings; at any rate I am truly happy to have an opportunity of assuring you how sincerely I am, revered Sir,

Your gratefully indebted humble Servant,

R. B.

*[Author of *An Inquiry, Historical and Critical, into the Evidence against Mary Queen of Scots*, 1759; addressed elsewhere by Burns as "Revered defender of beauteous Stuart."]

(1.) To A. F. Tytler, Esq.

Ellisland, [April,] 1791.

SIR,

NOTHING less than the unfortunate accident I have met with could have prevented my grateful acknowledgments for your letter. His own favourite poem, and that an essay in the walk of the Muses entirely new to him, where consequently his hopes and fears were on the most anxious alarm for his success in the attempt—to have that poem so much applauded by one of the first judges, was the most delicious vibration that ever thrilled along the heart-strings of a poor poet. However, Providence, to keep up the proper proportion of evil with the good, which it seems is necessary in this sublunary state, thought proper to check my exultation by a very serious misfortune. A day or two after I received your letter, my horse came down with me and broke my right arm. As this is the first service my arm has done me since its disaster, I find myself unable to do more than just, in general terms, thank you for this additional instance of your patronage and friendship. As to the faults you detected in the piece, they are truly there; one of them, the hit at the lawyer and priest, I shall cut out; as to the falling off in the catastrophe, for the reason you justly adduce, it cannot easily be remedied. Your approbation, Sir, has given me such additional spirits to persevere in this species of poetic composition, that I am already revolving two or three stories in my fancy. If I can bring these floating ideas to bear any kind of embodied form, it will give me an additional opportunity of assuring you how much I have the honor to be, &c.

R. B.

[Alexander Fraser Tytler, Esq., eldest son of the above William Tytler of Woodhouselee, was at this time highly distinguished in Edinburgh both as a litterateur and as a professorial lecturer in the University. The letter acknowledged by Burns contained a criticism on "Tam o' Shanter," which was highly complimentary, but which we need not here reproduce. Mr. Fraser Tytler was appointed Judge-Advocate of Scotland in 1790, and was afterwards raised to the bench in 1802, with the title of Lord Woodhouselee, by which he is most commonly distinguished. See note to next letter.]

(2.) TO A. F. TYTLER, ESQ.

SIR,

A POOR caitiff, driving as I am at this moment with an Excise quill, at the rate of "Devil take the hindmost," is ill qualified to round the period of gratitude, or swell the pathos of sensibility. Gratitude, like some other amiable qualities of the mind, is now-a-days so abused by impostors, that I have sometimes wished that the project of that sly dog Momus, I think it is, had gone into effect—planting a window in the breast of man. In that case, when a poor fellow comes, as I do at this moment, before his benefactor, tongue-tied with the sense of these very obligations, he would have nothing to do but place himself in front of his friend, and lay bare the workings of his bosom.

I again trouble you with another, and my last, parcel of manuscript. I am not interested in any of these; blot them at your pleasure. I am much indebted to you for taking the trouble of correcting the press work. One instance, indeed, may be rather unlucky; if the lines to Sir John Whiteford are printed, they ought to end—

“And tread the *shadowy* path to that dark world unknown.”

“Shadowy,” instead of “dreary,” as I believe it stands at present. I wish this could be noticed in the Errata. This comes of writing, as I generally do, from the memory.

I have the honour to be, Sir, your deeply indebted humble servant,

ROBT. BURNS.

6th Decr., 1795.

[This letter, now in possession of Lord Woodhouselee's grandson, Colonel Fraser Tytler of Aldourie, was printed for the first time in *Inverness Courier*, October 11, 1866. We have already had occasion to observe that the request of the Poet does not seem to have been attended to, in the necessary revision of the Press, in as much as the error referred to remains to this day. It is proper to mention, however, that Mr. Fraser Tytler, in 1795, was suffering from a very severe indisposition. By the same complaint, which returned in 1812, he was finally prostrated, and died on the 5th January, 1813, in the sixty-sixth year of his age.]

To the Rev. Arch. Alison.

Ellisland, near Dumfries, 14th Feb., 1791.

SIR,

YOU must by this time have set me down as one of the most ungrateful of men. You did me the honour to present me with a book, which does honour to science and the intellectual powers of man, and I have not even so much as acknowledged the receipt of it. The fact is, you yourself are to blame for it. Flattered as I was by your telling me that you wished to have my opinion of the work, the old spiritual enemy of mankind, who knows well that vanity is one of the sins that most easily beset me, put it into my head to ponder over the performance with the look-out of a critic, and to draw up forsooth a deep-learned digest of strictures on a composition, of which, in fact, until I read the book, I did not even know the first principles. I own, Sir, that at first glance, several of your propositions startled me as paradoxical. That the martial clangor of a trumpet had something in it vastly more grand, heroic, and sublime, than the tingle-twangle of a Jew's harp; that the delicate flexure of a rose-twig, when the half-blown flower is heavy with the tears of the dawn, was infinitely more beautiful and elegant than the upright stub of a burdock; and that from something innate and independent of all associations of ideas—these I had set down as irrefragable, orthodox truths, until perusing your book shook my faith. In short, Sir, except Euclid's Elements of Geometry, which I made a shift to unravel by my father's fire-side, in the winter evenings of the first season I held the plough, I never read a book which gave me such a quantum of information, and added so much

to my stock of ideas, as your “Essays on the Principles of Taste.” One thing, Sir, you must forgive my mentioning as an uncommon merit in the work, I mean the language. To clothe abstract philosophy in elegance of style, sounds something like a contradiction in terms; but you have convinced me that they are quite compatible.

I enclose you some poetic bagatelles of my late composition. The one in print is my first essay in the way of telling a tale.

I am, Sir, &c.,

R. B.

[On reading this letter, Dugald Stewart expressed his surprise, in a letter printed by Currie, that an Ayrshire peasant should have formed, independently, “a distinct conception of the general principles of the doctrine of association”—a favorite theme at that time, and since, with Scottish metaphysicians. The learned professor did not seem to see that the Poet was quietly heaping ridicule on the whole system. On the other hand, we do not know whether Mr. Ruskin, who has so eloquently illustrated the principles of architectural design and painting, may have studied this letter, but he certainly does seem to have adopted its principles—although the doctrine of association, subordinately, by him, is very beautifully blended with them. Our readers need hardly be reminded, perhaps, that the reverend gentleman here addressed, who was an Episcopalian clergyman in Edinburgh, was father of the late Sir Archibald Alison, Bart., author of the History of Europe.]

To the Rev. G. Baird.*

Ellisland, [February,] 1791.

REVEREND SIR,

WHY did you, my dear Sir, write to me in such a hesitating style on the business of poor Bruce? Don't I know, and have I not felt, the many ills, the peculiar ills that poetic flesh is heir to? You shall have your choice of all the unpublished poems I have; and had your letter had my direction so as to have reached me sooner (it only came to my hand this moment), I should have directly put you out of suspense on the subject. I only ask that some prefatory advertisement in the book, as well as the subscription bills, may bear that the publication is solely for the benefit of Bruce's mother. I would not put it in the power of ignorance to surmise, or malice to insinuate, that I clubbed a share in the work from mercenary motives. Nor need you give me credit for any remarkable generosity in my part of the business. I have such a host of peccadilloes, failings, follies, and backslidings (any body but myself might perhaps give some of them a worse appellation), that by way of some balance, however trifling, in the account, I am fain to do any good that occurs in my very limited power to a fellow-creature, just for the selfish purpose of clearing a little the vista of retrospection.†

R. B.

* [Rev. George Husband Baird—afterwards Principal of Edinburgh University.]

† [It does not appear that the contributions here promised by Burns were ultimately availed of.]

TO PRINTERS, PUBLISHERS, &c.

To Mr. Sibbald,

BOOKSELLER IN EDINBURGH.

Lawn-Market, [1787.]

SIR,

So little am I acquainted with the words and manners of the more public and polished walks of life, that I often feel myself much embarrassed how to express the feelings of my heart, particularly gratitude:—

“Rude am I in speech,
And little therefore shall I grace my cause
In speaking for myself—”

The warmth with which you have befriended an obscure man and a young author, in the last three magazines—I can only say, Sir, I feel the weight of the obligation: I wish I could express my sense of it. In the meantime, accept of the conscious acknowledgment from,

Sir,

Your obliged servant,

R. B.

[This letter first appeared in Nicholl's *Illustrations of Literature*. Mr. James Sibbald was himself distinguished in more than one walk of literary enterprise, but is best known by his ‘*Chronicle of Scottish Poetry*,’ an admirable and valuable, though now comparatively rare, work.]

To William Creech, Esq.,

EDINBURGH.

Selkirk, 13th May, 1787.

MY HONOURED FRIEND,

THE enclosed I have just wrote, nearly extempore, in a solitary inn in Selkirk, after a miserably wet day's riding. I have been over most of East Lothian, Berwick, Roxburgh, and Selkirk-shires: and next week I begin a tour through the north of England. Yesterday I dined with Lady Harriet,* sister to my noble patron—*Quem Deus conservet!* I would write till I would tire you as much with dull prose, as I dare say by this time you are with wretched verse, but I am jaded to death; so, with a grateful farewell,

I have the honor to be,

Good Sir, yours sincerely,

R. B.

[Verses enclosed were]

WILLIE'S AWA.

Auld chuckie Reekie's sair distrest, &c.

* Lady Harriet Don, sister to the Earl of Glencairn. See ‘*Journal*’—Appendix.]

(2.) TO WILLIAM CREECH, ESQ.

Ellisland, 30th May, 1789.

SIR,

I HAD intended to have troubled you with a long letter, but at present the delightful sensations of an omnipotent Toothache so engross all my inner man, as to put it out of my power even to write nonsense. However, as in duty bound, I approach my Bookseller with an offering in my hand—a few poetic clinches and a song:—To expect any other kind of offering from the RHYMING TRIBE, would be to know them much less than you do. I do not pretend that there is much merit in these *morceaux*, but I have two reasons for sending them; *primo*, they are mostly ill-natured, so are in unison with my present feelings, while fifty troops of infernal spirits are driving post from ear to ear along my jawbones; and *secondly*, they are so short, that you cannot leave off in the middle, and so hurt my pride in the idea that you found any work of mine too heavy to get through.

I have a request to beg of you, and I not only beg of you, but conjure you—by all your wishes and by all your hopes, that the Muse will spare the satiric wink in the moment of your foibles; that she will warble the song of rapture round your hymeneal couch; and that she will shed on your turf the honest tear of elegiac gratitude! grant my request as speedily as possible:—Send me by the very first fly or coach for this place, three copies of the last edition of my poems; which place to my account.

Now, may the good things of prose, and the good things of verse, come among thy hands until they be filled with the *good things of this life!* prayeth

ROBT. BURNS.

[Our Author's generosity in thus forwarding to Mr. Creech, after previous experience, so many new poetical effusions to enrich a new edition of his works, very much for that gentleman's advantage (see letter (8) to Hill), needs no commentary here, any more than the style in which that edition seems to have been conducted. After all attempts at adjustment or reconciliation, no permanent friendship seems to have been established between them. Dr. Currie indeed informs us on Mr. C.'s authority, “that whatever little differences subsisted between Burns and him had been made up long before the bard's death, and that he would do everything in his power to serve the family”—which, if not a questionable statement, looks very like a piece of special pleading. The two letters above printed are all we can now find extant of our Author's to Creech. His business letters to that gentleman, which were full of unpleasant recriminations—perhaps exaggerated complaints, were by Mrs. Hay's (Margaret Chalmers) advice, to whom they were submitted, finally destroyed.]

To Mr. Beugo,

ENGRAVER, EDINBURGH.

Ellisland, 9th Sept., 1788.

MY DEAR SIR,

THERE is not in Edinburgh above the number of the Graces whose letters would have given me so much pleasure as yours of the 3rd instant, which only reached me yesternight.

I am here on my farm, busy with my harvest; but for all

that most pleasurable part of life called SOCIAL COMMUNICATION, I am here at the very elbow of existence. The only things that are to be found in this country, in any degree of perfection, are stupidity and canting. Prose they only know in graces, prayers, &c., and the value of these they estimate as they do their plaiding webs—by the ell! As for the Muses, they have as much an idea of a rhinoceros as of a poet. For my old capricious but good-natured huzzy of a Muse—

"By banks of Nith I sat and wept
When Coila I thought on,
In midst thereof I hung my harp
The willow-trees upon."

I am generally about half my time in Ayrshire with my "darling Jean," and then I, at lucid intervals, throw my horny fist across my be-cobwebbed lyre, much in the same manner as an old wife throws her hand across the spokes of her spinning-wheel.

I will send you the "Fortunate Shepherdess" as soon as I return to Ayrshire, for there I keep it with other precious treasure. I shall send it by a careful hand, as I would not for any thing it should be mislaid or lost. I do not wish to serve you from any benevolence, or other grave Christian virtue; 'tis purely a selfish gratification of my own feelings whenever I think of you.

You do not tell me if you are going to be married. Depend upon it, if you do not make some foolish choice, it will be a very great improvement on the dish of life. I can speak from experience, though, God knows, my choice was as random as blind man's buff. * * *

If your better functions would give you leisure to write me, I should be extremely happy; that is to say, if you neither keep nor look for a regular correspondence. I hate the idea of being obliged to write a letter. I sometimes write a friend twice a week, at other times once a quarter.

I am exceedingly pleased with your fancy in making the author you mention place a map of Iceland instead of his portrait before his works: 'twas a glorious idea.*

Could you conveniently do me one thing?—whenever you finish any head I should like to have a proof copy of it. I might tell you a long story about your fine genius; but as what every body knows cannot have escaped you, I shall not say one syllable about it.

If you see Mr. Nasmyth, remember me to him most respectfully, as he both loves and deserves respect: though, if he would pay less respect to the mere carcass of greatness, I should think him much nearer perfection.

R. B.

* [This is undoubtedly an allusion to Creech, who had been publishing some frozen stuff of his own from the newspapers.]

[Mr. Beugo was an engraver of great skill, and of the highest reputation then in Edinburgh. He was employed to transfer Nasmyth's celebrated picture of our Author to copper, as a frontispiece for the new edition of his works. Into this engraving he introduced finishing touches of his own from the life, having had the Poet himself frequently as a sitter before him. His work has, therefore, been considered by many superior to the original. Having a photograph of Nasmyth's portrait before us, we are by no means of this opinion; and having carefully studied the expression of both, in comparison with the miniature of 1795, we cease to regard either the one or the other as a reliable representation of Robert Burns.]

To Mr. William Smellie,

PRINTER.

Dumfries, 22nd January, 1792.

I SIT down, my dear Sir, to introduce a young lady to you, and a lady in the first ranks of fashion too. What a task! to you who care no more for the herd of animals called young ladies, than you do for the herd of animals called young gentlemen. To you—who despise and detest the groupings and combinations of fashion, as an idiot painter that seems industrious to place staring fools and unprincipled knaves in the foreground of his picture, while men of sense and honesty are too often thrown in the dimmest shades. Mrs. Riddel, who will take this letter to town with her, and send it to you, is a character that, even in your own way, as a naturalist and a philosopher, would be an acquisition to your acquaintance. The lady, too, is a votary to the Muses; and as I think myself somewhat of a judge in my own trade, I assure you that her verses, always correct, and often elegant, are much beyond the common run of the *lady-poetesses* of the day. She is a great admirer of your book; and hearing me say that I was acquainted with you, she begged to be known to you, as she is just going to pay her first visit to our Caledonian capital. I told her that her best way was, to desire her near relation, and your intimate friend, Craigdarroch, to have you at his house while she was there; and lest you might think of a lively West Indian girl of eighteen, as girls of eighteen too often deserve to be thought of, I should take care to remove that prejudice. To be impartial, however, in appreciating the lady's merits, she has one unlucky failing—a failing which you will easily discover, as she seems rather pleased with indulging in it; and a failing that you will easily pardon, as it is a sin which very much besets yourself—where she dislikes or despises, she is apt to make no more a secret of it than where she esteems and respects.

I will not present you with the unmeaning *compliments of the season*, but I will send you my warmest wishes and most ardent prayers, that FORTUNE may never throw your SUBSISTENCE to the mercy of a KNAVE, or set your CHARACTER on the judgment of a FOOL; but, that upright and erect, you may walk to an honest grave, where men of letters shall say, "Here lies a man who did honor to science;" and men of worth shall say, "Here lies a man who did honor to human nature."

R. B.

[This admirable letter was to introduce Mrs. W. Riddel (Maria Woodley), who was anxious to obtain Mr. Smellie's assistance in the publication of her voyage to Madeira and the Leeward Isles. On this work the old gentleman pronounced the highest eulogium, and subsequently paid a visit to the authoress, See *Heroines of Burns*—Appendix. "Your book" referred to ("Sinful old Smellie and his second volume") was a work published by him entitled *The Philosophy of Natural History*—in which there was much shrewd speculation; of which the first volume had already been published, and the second was anxiously expected by his friends.]

To Francis Grose, Esq., F.S.A.

(1.)

Dumfries, 1792.

SIR,

I BELIEVE among all our Scots literati you have not met with Professor Dugald Stewart, who fills the moral philosophy chair in the University of Edinburgh. To say that he is a man of the first parts, and, what is more, a man of the first worth, to a gentleman of your general acquaintance, and who so much enjoys the luxury of unencumbered freedom and undisturbed privacy, is not perhaps recommendation enough; but when I inform you that Mr. Stewart's principal characteristic is your favorite feature—that sterling independence of mind which, though every man's right, so few men have the courage to claim, and fewer still the magnanimity to support; when I tell you that, unseduced by splendour, and undisgusted by wretchedness, he appreciates the merits of the various actors in the great drama of life merely as they perform their parts—in short, he is a man after your own heart, and I comply with his earnest request in letting you know that he wishes above all things to meet with you. His house, Catrine, is within less than a mile of Sorn Castle, which you proposed visiting; or if you could transmit him the enclosed, he would, with the greatest pleasure, meet you anywhere in the neighbourhood. I write to Ayrshire to inform Mr. Stewart that I have acquitted myself of my promise. Should your time and spirits permit your meeting with Mr. Stewart, 'tis well; if not, I hope you will forgive this liberty, and I have at least an opportunity of assuring you with what truth and respect

I am, Sir,

Your great admirer,

and very humble servant,

R. B.

(2.) TO FRANCIS GROSE, ESQ., F.S.A.

Dumfries, 1792.

AMONG the many witch-stories I have heard relating to Alloway Kirk, I distinctly remember only two or three.

Upon a stormy night, amid whistling squalls of wind, and bitter blasts of hail—in short, on such a night as the devil would choose to take the air in—a farmer, or farmer's servant, was plodding and plashing homeward with his plough-irons on his shoulder, having been getting some repairs on them at a neighbouring smithy. His way lay by the Kirk of Alloway; and being rather on the anxious look-out in approaching a place so well known to be a favourite haunt of the devil, and the devil's friends and emissaries, he was struck aghast by discovering, through the horrors of the storm and stormy night, a light, which on his nearer approach plainly showed itself to proceed from the haunted edifice. Whether he had been fortified from above, on his devout supplication, as is customary

with people when they suspect the immediate presence of Satan; or whether, according to another custom, he had got courageously drunk at the smithy, I will not pretend to determine: but so it was that he ventured to go up to, nay, into the very kirk. As luck would have it, his temerity came off unpunished.

The members of the infernal junto were all out on some midnight business or other, and he saw nothing but a kind of kettle, or cauldron, depending from the roof, over the fire, simmering some heads of unchristened children, limbs of executed malefactors, &c., for the business of the night. It was in for a penny in for a pound, with the honest ploughman: so without ceremony he unhooked the cauldron from off the fire, and pouring out the damnable ingredients, inverted it on his head, and carried it fairly home, where it remained long in the family, a living evidence of the truth of the story.

Another story, which I can prove to be equally authentic, was as follows:—

On a market-day in the town of Ayr, a farmer from Carrick, and consequently whose way lay by the very gate of Alloway Kirkyard, in order to cross the river Doon at the old bridge, which is about two or three hundred yards farther on than the said gate, had been detained by his business, till by the time he reached Alloway it was the wizard-hour—between night and morning.

Though he was terrified with a blaze streaming from the kirk, yet as it is a well-known fact that to turn back on these occasions is running by far the greatest risk of mischief, he prudently advanced on his road. When he had reached the gate of the kirkyard, he was surprised and entertained, through the ribs and arches of an old Gothic window, which still faces the highway,* to see a dance of witches merrily footing it round their old sooty blackguard master, who was keeping them all alive with the power of his bagpipe. The farmer, stopping his horse to observe them a little, could plainly descry the faces of many old women of his acquaintance and neighbourhood. How the gentleman was dressed tradition does not say; but that the ladies were all in their smocks: and one of them happening unluckily to have a smock which was considerably too short to answer all the purposes of that piece of dress, our farmer was so tickled that he involuntarily burst out, with a loud laugh, “Weel luppen, Maggy wi’ the short sark!” and recollecting himself, instantly spurred his horse to the top of his speed. I need not mention the universally known fact, that no diabolical power can pursue you beyond the middle of a running stream. Lucky it was for the poor farmer that the river Doon was so near, for notwithstanding the speed of his horse, which was a good one, against he reached the middle of the arch of the bridge, and consequently the middle of the stream, the pursuing, vengeful hags were so close at his heels, that one of them actually sprang to seize him: but it was too late; nothing was on her side of the stream but the horse's tail, which immediately gave way at her infernal grip, as if blasted by a stroke of lightning; but the farmer was beyond her reach. However, the unsightly, tail-less condition of the vigorous steed was,

to the last hour of the noble creature's life, an awful warning to the Carrick farmers not to stay too late in Ayr markets.

The last relation I shall give, though equally true, is not so well identified as the two former, with regard to the scene; but as the best authorities give it for Alloway, I shall relate it.

On a summer's evening, about the time nature puts on her sables to mourn the expiry of the cheerful day, a shepherd-boy, belonging to a farmer in the immediate neighbourhood of Alloway Kirk, had just folded his charge, and was returning home. As he passed the kirk, in the adjoining field he fell in with a crew of men and women, who were busy pulling stems of the plant ragwort. He observed that as each person pulled a ragwort, he or she got astride of it, and called out, "Up, horsie!" on which the ragwort flew off, like Pegasus, through the air with its rider. The foolish boy likewise pulled his ragwort, and cried with the rest, "Up, horsie!" and, strange to tell, away he flew with the company. The first stage at which the cavalcade stopt was a merchant's wine-cellar in Bordeaux, where, without saying by your leave, they quaffed away at the best the cellar could afford, until the morning, foe to the imps and works of darkness, threatened to throw light on the matter, and frightened them from their carousals.

The poor shepherd-lad, being equally a stranger to the scene and the liquor, heedlessly got himself drunk; and when the rest took horse, he fell asleep, and was found so next day by some of the people belonging to the merchant. Somebody that understood Scotch, asking him what he was, he said such-a-one's herd in Alloway, and by some means or other getting home again, he lived long to tell the world the wondrous tale.

I am, &c.

R. B.

* [That is the old highway, which passed on the south-west side of the kirk.]

[This letter was communicated by Mr. Gilchrist, of Stamford, to Sir Egerton Brydges, by whom it was published in the *Censura Literaria*, 1796. The reader may compare note on "Tam o' Shanter," *Poetical Works*, p. 247. There is a most singular correspondence between the whole of the third story and several scenes in *Faust*—especially the Witches' ride, and the revel in the Wine-shop: Faust, we may remind our readers, was not published till 1808.]

(1.) To Mr. [Peter Stuart.]

Edinburgh, March, 1787.

MY DEAR SIR,

You may think, and too justly, that I am a selfish, ungrateful fellow, having received so many repeated instances of kindness from you, and yet never putting pen to paper to say thank you; but if you knew what a devil of a life my conscience has led me on that account, your good heart would think yourself too much avenged. By the bye, there is nothing in the whole frame of man which seems to me so unaccountable as that thing called conscience. Had the

troublesome yelping cur powers efficient to prevent a mischief, he might be of use; but at the beginning of the business, his feeble efforts are to the workings of passion as the infant frosts of an autumnal morning to the unclouded fervour of the rising sun: and no sooner are the tumultuous doings of the wicked deed over, than, amidst the bitter native consequences of folly, in the very vortex of our horrors, up starts conscience, and harrows us with the feelings of the damned.

I have inclosed you, by way of expiation, some verse and prose, that, if they merit a place in your truly entertaining miscellany, you are welcome to. The prose extract is literally as Mr. Sprott sent it me.

The inscription on the stone is as follows:

HERE LIES ROBERT FERGUSSON, POET.

Born, September 5th, 1751—Died, 16th October, 1774.

No sculptur'd marble here, nor pompous lay,

"No storied urn, nor animated bust;"

This simple stone directs pale Scotia's way

To pour her sorrows o'er her poet's dust.

On the other side of the stone is as follows:

"By special grant of the managers to Robert Burns, who erected this stone, this burial-place is to remain for ever sacred to the memory of Robert Fergusson."

Session-house, within the Kirk of Canongate, the twenty-second day of February, one thousand seven hundred eighty-seven years.

Sederunt of the Managers of the Kirk and Kirk-Yard funds of Canongate.

Which day, the treasurer to the said funds produced a letter from Mr. Robert Burns, of date the 6th current, which was read and appointed to be engrossed in their sederunt book, and of which letter the tenor follows:—

"To the honourable baillies of Canongate, Edinburgh.—Gentlemen, I am sorry to be told that the remains of Robert Fergusson, the so justly celebrated poet, a man whose talents for ages to come will do honor to our Caledonian name, lie in your church-yard among the ignoble dead, unnoticed and unknown.

"Some memorial to direct the steps of the lovers of Scottish song, when they wish to shed a tear over the 'narrow house' of the bard who is no more, is surely a tribute due to Fergusson's memory: a tribute I wish to have the honor of paying.

"I petition you then, gentlemen, to permit me to lay a simple stone over his revered ashes, to remain an unalienable property to his deathless fame. I have the honor to be, gentlemen, your very humble servant (*sic subscribitur*),

ROBERT BURNS."

Thereafter the said managers, in consideration of the laudable and disinterested motion of Mr. Burns, and the propriety of his request, did, and hereby do, unanimously, grant power

and liberty to the said Robert Burns to erect a headstone at the grave of the said Robert Fergusson, and to keep up and preserve the same to his memory in all time coming. Extracted forth of the records of the managers, by

WILLIAM SPROTT, Clerk.

(2.)* TO MR. [PETER STUART.]

[Autumn,] 1789.

MY DEAR SIR,

THE hurry of a farmer in this particular season, and the indolence of a poet at all times and seasons, will, I hope, plead my excuse for neglecting so long to answer your obliging letter of the 5th of August.

That you have done well in quitting your laborious concern in * * * I do not doubt; the weighty reasons you mention were, I hope, very, and deservedly indeed, weighty ones, and your health is a matter of the last importance; but whether the remaining proprietors of the paper have also done well, is what I much doubt. The [*Star*,] so far as I was a reader, exhibited such a brilliancy of point, such an elegance of paragraph, and such a variety of intelligence, that I can hardly conceive it possible to continue a daily paper in the same degree of excellence: but if there was a man who had abilities equal to the task, that man's assistance the proprietors have lost.

When I received your letter I was transcribing for [*the Star*] my letter to the magistrates of the Canongate, Edinburgh, begging their permission to place a tomb-stone over poor Fergusson, and their edict in consequence of my petition; but now I shall send them to * * * * *. Poor Fergusson! If there be a life beyond the grave, which I trust there is; and if there be a good God presiding over all nature, which I am sure there is—thou art now enjoying existence in a glorious world, where worth of the heart alone is distinction in the man; where riches, deprived of all their pleasure-purchasing powers, return to their native sordid matter; where titles and honors are the disregarded reveries of an idle dream; and where that heavy virtue, which is the negative consequence of steady dulness, and those thoughtless, though often destructive follies, which are the unavoidable aberrations of frail human nature, will be thrown into equal oblivion as if they had never been!

Adieu, my dear Sir! So soon as your present views and schemes are concentrated in an aim, I shall be glad to hear from you; as your welfare and happiness is by no means a subject indifferent to,

Yours,

R. B.

* [Dr. Currie having concealed the name of the correspondent to whom these two letters were addressed, they have long been printed without any address at all. We are indebted to Mr. Chambers for having determined to whom they belong. Mr. Stuart was one of three brothers—Charles, Peter, and Daniel—all men of literary celebrity at the time. To the same gentleman, in his professional character as editor of the *Star*, the following letter had been addressed about a twelvemonth before the above; but in the meantime, as we may conclude from the above, he had resigned his editorship. His admiration of Fergusson (who was eight years older than himself, and the intimate friend of his elder brother Charles) seems to have been unbounded. See Appendix—Scottish Language. For Burns's opinion of the *Star*, see Poetical Works, p. 342, c. 1.]

To the Editor of "*The Star*."

November 8th, 1788.

SIR,

NOTWITHSTANDING the opprobrious epithets with which some of our philosophers and gloomy sectarians have branded our nature—the principle of universal selfishness, the proneness to all evil, they have given us; still, the detestation in which inhumanity to the distressed, and insolence to the fallen, are held by all mankind, shows that they are not natives of the human heart. Even the unhappy partner of our kind who is undone—the bitter consequence of his follies or his crimes—who but sympathizes with the miseries of this ruined profligate brother? We forget the injuries, and feel for the man.

I went, last Wednesday, to my parish church, most cordially to join in grateful acknowledgment to the AUTHOR OF ALL GOOD, for the consequent blessings of the glorious Revolution. To that auspicious event we owe no less than our liberties, civil and religious; to it we are likewise indebted for the present Royal Family, the ruling features of whose administration have ever been mildness to the subject, and tenderness of his rights.

Bred and educated in revolution principles, the principles of reason and common sense, it could not be any silly political prejudice which made my heart revolt at the harsh abusive manner in which the reverend gentleman mentioned the House of Stuart, and which, I am afraid, was too much the language of the day. We may rejoice sufficiently in our deliverance from past evils, without cruelly raking up the ashes of those whose misfortune it was, perhaps as much as their crime, to be the authors of those evils; and we may bless God for all his goodness to us as a nation, without at the same time cursing a few ruined, powerless exiles, who only harboured ideas, and made attempts, that most of us would have done, had we been in their situation.

"The bloody and tyrannical House of Stuart" may be said with propriety and justice, when compared with the present royal family, and the sentiments of our days; but is there no allowance to be made for the manners of the times? Were the royal contemporaries of the Stuarts more attentive to their subjects' rights? Might not the epithets of "bloody and tyrannical" be, with at least equal justice, applied to the House of Tudor, of York, or any other of their predecessors?

The simple state of the case, Sir, seems to be this:—At that period, the science of government, the knowledge of the true relation between king and subject, was like other sciences and other knowledge, just in its infancy, emerging from dark ages of ignorance and barbarity.

The Stuarts only contended for prerogatives which they knew their predecessors enjoyed, and which they saw their contemporaries enjoying; but these prerogatives were inimical to the happiness of a nation and the rights of subjects.

In this contest between prince and people, the consequence of that light of science which had lately dawned over Europe, the monarch of France, for example, was victorious over the

struggling liberties of his people; with us, luckily the monarch failed, and his unwarrantable pretensions fell a sacrifice to our rights and happiness. Whether it was owing to the wisdom of leading individuals, or to the justling of parties, I cannot pretend to determine; but, likewise happily for us, the kingly power was shifted into another branch of the family, who, as they owed the throne solely to the call of a free people, could claim nothing inconsistent with the covenanted terms which placed them there.

The Stuarts have been condemned and laughed at for the folly and impracticability of their attempts in 1715 and 1745. That they failed, I bless God: but cannot join in the ridicule against them. Who does not know that the abilities or defects of leaders and commanders are often hidden until put to the touchstone of exigency; and that there is a caprice of fortune, an omnipotence in particular accidents and conjunctures of circumstances, which exalt us as heroes, or brand us as madmen, just as they are for or against us?

Man, Mr. Publisher, is a strange, weak, inconsistent being: who would believe, Sir, that in this our Augustan age of liberality and refinement, while we seem so justly sensible and jealous of our rights and liberties, and animated with such indignation against the very memory of those who would have subverted them—that a certain people under our national protection should complain, not against our monarch and a few favorite advisers, but against our WHOLE LEGISLATIVE BODY, for similar oppression, and almost in the very same terms, as our forefathers did of the House of Stuart! I will not, I cannot, enter into the merits of the cause; but I dare say the American Congress, in 1776, will be allowed to be as able and as enlightened as the English Convention was in 1688; and that their posterity will celebrate the centenary of their deliverance from us, as duly and sincerely as we do ours from the oppressive measures of the wrong-headed House of Stuart.

To conclude, Sir; let every man who has a tear for the many miseries incident to humanity, feel for a family illustrious as any in Europe, and unfortunate beyond historic precedent; and let every Briton (and particularly every Scotsman), who ever looked with reverential pity on the dotage of a parent, cast a veil over the fatal mistakes of the kings of his forefathers.

R. B.

[This letter, which contains such an admirable statement of the whole case, and which is so decidedly prophetic not only in its tone but in its very terms, demonstrates the writer to have been, both in politics and philosophy, a hundred years at least before his day. It was provoked by the illiberality of Rev. Mr. Kirkpatrick's sermon on occasion of the Assembly's Thanksgiving-day, Nov. 5th, 1788, to celebrate the centenary of King William's arrival at Torbay, to assume the government of these Islands and maintain Protestant ascendancy.]

TO THE

Editor of the "Morning Chronicle."

[Dumfries, 1795.]

SIR,

You will see, by your subscribers' list, that I have been about nine months of that number.

I am sorry to inform you, that in that time seven or eight of your papers either have never been sent me, or else have never reached me. To be deprived of any one number of the first newspaper in Great Britain for information, ability, and independence, is what I can ill brook and bear; but to be deprived of that most admirable oration of the Marquis of Lansdowne, when he made the great, though ineffectual attempt (in the language of the poet, I fear too true) "to save a SINKING STATE"—this was a loss that I neither can nor will forgive you.—That paper, Sir, never reached me; but I demand it of you. I am a BRITON; and must be interested in the cause of LIBERTY: I am a MAN; and the RIGHTS OF HUMAN NATURE cannot be indifferent to me. However, do not let me mislead you: I am not a man in that situation of life which, as your subscriber, can be of any consequence to you, in the eyes of those to whom SITUATION OF LIFE ALONE is the criterion of MAN.—I am but a plain tradesman, in this distant, obscure country town; but that humble domicile in which I shelter my wife and children is the CASTELLUM of a BRITON; and that scanty, hard-earned income which supports them, is as truly my property, as the most magnificent fortune of the most PUISSANT MEMBER of your HOUSE OF NOBLES.

Those, Sir, are my sentiments; and to them I subscribe my name: and were I a man of ability and consequence enough to address the PUBLIC, with that name should they appear.

I am, &c.

[This letter owes its origin to the following circumstance. A neighbour of the Poet's at Dumfries called on him, and complained that he was greatly disappointed in the irregular delivery of the Paper of *The Morning Chronicle*. Burns asked, "Why do not you write to the Editors of the Paper?" "Good God, Sir, can I presume to write to the learned Editors of a Newspaper?"—"Well, if you are afraid of writing to the Editors of a Newspaper, I am not; and if you think proper, I'll draw up a sketch of a letter, which you may copy."

Burns tore a leaf from his excise book and instantly produced the sketch which I have transcribed, and which is here printed. The poor man thanked him, and took the letter home. However, that caution which the watchfulness of his enemies had taught him to exercise, prompted him to the prudence of begging a friend to wait on the person for whom it was written, and request the favor to have it returned. This request was complied with, and the paper never appeared in print.—*Cromek.*]

TO PATRONS.

To the Earl of Eglintoun.

[Edinburgh, January 11, 1787.]

MY LORD,

As I have but slender pretensions to philosophy, I cannot rise to the exalted ideas of a citizen of the world, but have all those national prejudices which I believe glow peculiarly strong in the breast of a Scotchman. There is scarcely any thing to which I am so feelingly alive as the honor and welfare of my country: and, as a poet, I have no higher

enjoyment than singing her sons and daughters. Fate had cast my station in the veriest shades of life, but never did a heart pant more ardently than mine to be distinguished; though, till very lately, I looked in vain on every side for a ray of light. It is easy then to guess how much I was gratified with the countenance and approbation of one of my country's most illustrious sons, when Mr. Wauchope called on me yesterday on the part of your lordship. Your munificence, my lord, certainly deserves my very grateful acknowledgments; but your patronage is a bounty peculiarly suited to my feelings.* I am not master enough of the etiquette of life to know whether there be not some impropriety in troubling your lordship with my thanks, but my heart whispered me to do it. From the emotions of my inmost soul I do it. Selfish ingratitude I hope I am incapable of; and mercenary servility, I trust, I shall ever have so much honest pride as to detest.

R. B.

* [His lordship had become a subscriber for the new edition of our Author's poems, and had also presented him with a donation of ten guineas, by the gentleman's hand above mentioned.]

(1.) To the Earl of Glencairn.

[*Edinburgh, February, 1787.*]

MY LORD,

I WANTED to purchase a profile of your lordship, which I was told was to be got in town; but I am truly sorry to see that a blundering painter has spoiled a "human face divine." The enclosed stanzas I intended to have written below a picture or profile of your lordship, could I have been so happy as to procure one with anything of a likeness.

As I will soon return to my shades, I wanted to have something like a material object for my gratitude; I wanted to have it in my power to say to a friend, there is my noble patron, my generous benefactor. Allow me, my lord, to publish these verses. I conjure your lordship, by the honest throes of gratitude, by the generous wish of benevolence, by all the powers and feelings which compose the magnanimous mind, do not deny me this petition. I owe much to your lordship; and, what has not in some other instances always been the case with me, the weight of the obligation is a pleasing load. I trust I have a heart as independent as your lordship's, than which I can say nothing more; and I would not be beholden to favours that would crucify my feelings. Your dignified character in life, and manner of supporting that character, are flattering to my pride; and I would be jealous of the purity of my grateful attachment, where I was under the patronage of one of the much-favored sons of fortune.

Almost every poet has celebrated his patrons, particularly when they were names dear to fame, and illustrious in their

country; allow me, then, my lord, if you think the verses have intrinsic merit, to tell the world how much I have the honor to be,

Your lordship's highly indebted,
and ever grateful humble servant,

R. B.

[The permission here requested was not granted. The verses will be found among Posthumous Works.]

(2.) TO THE EARL OF GLENCAIRN.

[*Edinburgh, May 4, 1787.*]

MY LORD,

I GO away to-morrow morning early, and allow me to vent the fulness of my heart, in thanking your lordship for all that patronage, that benevolence, and that friendship with which you have honored me. With brimful eyes, I pray that you may find in that great Being, whose image you so nobly bear, that friend which I have found in you. My gratitude is not selfish design—that I disdain; it is not dodging after the heels of greatness—that is an offering you disdain. It is a feeling of the same kind with my devotion.

R. B.

[Written on the eve of our Author's leaving Edinburgh on his border tour, in company with his young friend Ainslie. If the reader will compare this letter with that addressed to Rev. Dr. Blair (*p.* 115), he will perceive by the difference of one day in the date, that there had been a little delay on the occasion of their starting. They did actually leave town on Saturday, the fifth day of May. Mr. Chambers has discovered that Burns was at Covington Mains, Lanarkshire, between 30th April and 3rd May—an entry in Mr. Prentie's journal there, May 1, 1787, bearing "Mr. Burns here." Mr. Chambers concludes that this secret short excursion had reference to some temporary love affair. Not improbably: compare our own note on the song—"Yon Wild Mossy Mountains:" Poetical Works, *p.* 280.]

(3.) TO THE EARL OF GLENCAIRN.

[*Edinburgh, 1787.*]

MY LORD,

I KNOW your lordship will disapprove of my ideas in a request I am going to make to you; but I have weighed, long and seriously weighed, my situation, my hopes, and turn of mind, and am fully fixed to my scheme if I can possibly effectuate it. I wish to get into the Excise: I am told that your lordship's interest will easily procure me the grant from the commissioners; and your lordship's patronage and goodness, which have already rescued me from obscurity, wretchedness, and exile, embolden me to ask that interest. You have likewise put it in my power to save the little tie of home that sheltered an aged mother, two brothers, and three sisters from destruction. There, my lord, you have bound me over to the highest gratitude.

My brother's farm is but a wretched lease, but I think he will probably weather out the remaining seven years of it; and after the assistance which I have given and will give him, to keep the family together, I think, by my guess, I shall have rather better than two hundred pounds; and instead of seeking, what is almost impossible at present to find, a farm that I can certainly live by, with so small a stock, I shall lodge this sum in a banking-house, a sacred deposit, excepting only the calls of uncommon distress or necessitous old age.

These, my lord, are my views: I have resolved from the maturest deliberation; and now I am fixed, I shall leave no stone unturned to carry my resolve into execution. Your lordship's patronage is the strength of my hopes; nor have I yet applied to any body else. Indeed, my heart sinks within me at the idea of applying to any other of the great who have honoured me with their countenance. I am ill qualified to dog the heels of greatness with the impertinence of solicitation, and tremble nearly as much at the thought of the cold promise as the cold denial; but to your lordship I have not only the honor, the comfort, but the pleasure of being

Your lordship's much obliged
and deeply indebted humble servant,

R. B.

[The above letters are all addressed to James, Fourteenth Earl of Glencairn, the Poet's well-known, generous, and much-loved patron—on occasion of whose death the celebrated "Lament" was written. His lordship was pre-eminently remarkable for manly beauty.]

To the Earl of Glencairn.

May, 1794.

MY LORD,

WHEN you cast your eye on the name at the bottom of this letter, and on the title-page of the book I do myself the honor to send your lordship, a more pleasurable feeling than my vanity tells me that it must be a name not entirely unknown to you. The generous patronage of your late illustrious brother found me in the lowest obscurity: he introduced my rustic Muse to the partiality of my country; and to him I owe all. My sense of his goodness, and the anguish of my soul at losing my truly noble protector and friend, I have endeavoured to express in a poem to his memory, which I have now published. This edition is just from the press; and in my gratitude to the dead, and my respect for the living (fame belies you, my lord, if you possess not the same dignity of man, which was your noble brother's characteristic feature), I had destined a copy for the Earl of Glencairn. I learnt just now that you are in town: allow me to present it you.

I know, my lord, such is the vile, venal contagion which pervades the world of letters, that professions of respect from an author, particularly from a poet to a lord, are more than suspicious. I claim my by-past conduct, and my feelings at

this moment, as exceptions to the too just conclusion. Exalted as are the honors of your lordship's name, and unnoted as is the obscurity of mine; with the uprightness of an honest man, I come before your lordship with an offering—however humble, 'tis all I have to give—of my grateful respect; and to beg of you, my lord—'tis all I have to ask of you—that you will do me the honor to accept of it.

I have the honor to be, &c.,

R. B.

[John, Fifteenth Earl of Glencairn, succeeded his brother James in 1791, and died in 1796. He was the last male representative of the ancient and influential House of Cunningham, and with him the title of Glencairn became extinct.]

To the Earl of Buchan.

MY LORD,

THE honor your lordship has done me, by your notice and advice in yours of the 1st instant, I shall ever gratefully remember:—

"Praise from thy lips 'tis mine with joy to boast,
They best can give it who deserve it most."

Your lordship touches the darling chord of my heart, when you advise me to fire my muse at Scottish story and Scottish scenes. I wish for nothing more than to make a leisurely pilgrimage through my native country; to sit and muse on those once hard-contended fields, where Caledonia, rejoicing, saw her bloody lion borne through broken ranks to victory and fame: and, catching the inspiration, to pour the deathless names in song. But, my lord, in the midst of these enthusiastic reveries, a long-visaged, dry, moral-looking phantom strides across my imagination, and pronounces these emphatic words:—

"I, Wisdom, dwell with Prudence. Friend, I do not come to open the ill-closed wounds of your follies and misfortunes, merely to give you pain: I wish through these wounds to imprint a lasting lesson on your heart. I will not mention how many of my salutary advices you have despised: I have given you line upon line and precept upon precept; and while I was chalking out to you the straight way to wealth and character, with audacious effrontery you have zigzagged across the path, contemning me to my face: you know the consequences. It is not yet three months since home was so hot for you, that you were on the wing from the western shore of the Atlantic, not to make a fortune, but to hide your misfortune.

"Now that your dear-loved Scotia puts it in your power to return to the situation of your forefathers, will you follow these will-o'-wisp meteors of fancy and whim, till they bring you once more to the brink of ruin? I grant that the utmost ground you can occupy is but half a step from the veriest poverty; but still it is half a step from it. If all that I can urge be ineffectual, let her who seldom calls to you in vain, let the call of pride prevail with you. You know how you feel at the iron gripe of ruthless oppression: you know how you bear the galling sneer of contumelious greatness. I hold you

out the conveniences, the comforts of life, independence and character, on the one hand; I tender you servility, dependence, and wretchedness, on the other. I will not insult your understanding by bidding you make a choice."

This, my lord, is unanswerable. I must return to my humble station, and woo my rustic muse in my wonted way at the plough-tail. Still, my lord, while the drops of life warm my heart, gratitude to that dear-loved country in which I boast my birth, and gratitude to those her distinguished sons, who have honored me so much with their patronage and approbation, shall, while stealing through my humble shades, ever distend my bosom, and at times, as now, draw forth the swelling tear.

R. B.

(2.) TO THE EARL OF BUCHAN.

Ellisland, August 29th, 1791.

MY LORD,

LANGUAGE sinks under the ardour of my feelings when I would thank your lordship for the honor you have done me in inviting me to make one at the coronation of the bust of Thomson. In my first enthusiasm in reading the card you did me the honor to write me, I overlooked every obstacle, and determined to go; but I fear it will not be in my power. A week or two's absence, in the very middle of my harvest, is what I much doubt I dare not venture on. I once already made a pilgrimage *up* the whole course of the Tweed, and fondly would I take the same delightful journey *down* the windings of that delightful stream.

Your lordship hints at an ode for the occasion: but who would write after Collins? I read over his verses to the memory of Thomson, and despaired. I got, indeed, to the length of three or four stanzas, in the way of address to the shade of the bard on crowning his bust. I shall trouble your lordship with the subjoined copy of them, which, I am afraid, will be but too convincing a proof how unequal I am to the task. However, it affords me an opportunity of approaching your lordship, and declaring how sincerely and gratefully I have the honor to be, &c.

R. B.

[Here follows ADDRESS TO THE SHADE OF THOMSON.]

(3.) TO THE EARL OF BUCHAN,

WITH A COPY OF "BRUCE'S ADDRESS TO HIS TROOPS
AT BANNOCKBURN."

Dumfries, 12th Jan., 1794.

MY LORD,

WILL your lordship allow me to present you with the enclosed little composition of mine, as a small tribute of gratitude for that acquaintance with which you have been

pleased to honor me. Independent of my enthusiasm as a Scotsman, I have rarely met with any thing in history which interests my feelings as a man, equal with the story of Bannockburn. On the one hand, a cruel, but able usurper, leading on the finest army in Europe to extinguish the last spark of freedom among a greatly-daring and greatly-injured people: on the other hand, the desperate relics of a gallant nation, devoting themselves to rescue their bleeding country, or perish with her.

Liberty! thou art a prize truly, and indeed invaluable!—for never canst thou be too dearly bought!

If my little ode has the honor of your lordship's approbation, it will gratify my highest ambition.

I have the honor to be, &c.,

R. B.

[David Stewart Erskine, the Earl of Buchan to whom these letters are addressed, seems to have been a weak-minded, vain, intrusive personage, who believed himself to be a man of genius and affected literature. He undertook at the same time to advise the living, and to patronise the memory of the dead, in a style which made himself at last ridiculous. We do not think it at all necessary to rehearse his sayings and doings in the present case: Burns sufficiently understood his character, and wrote to him accordingly, as to a grown child Henry Erskine, and Thomas, Lord (Chancellor) Erskine, so celebrated for their eloquence and wit, were younger brothers of the Earl.]

To Sir John Whitefoord.

Edinburgh, December, 1787.

SIR,

MR. MACKENZIE, in Mauchline, my very warm and worthy friend, has informed me how much you are pleased to interest yourself in my fate as a man, and (what to me is incomparably dearer) my fame as a poet. I have, Sir, in one or two instances, been patronized by those of your character in life, when I was introduced to their notice by * * * *, friends to them, and honored acquaintances to me! but you are the first gentleman in the country whose benevolence and goodness of heart has interested himself for me, unsolicited and unknown. I am not master enough of the etiquette of these matters to know, nor did I stay to inquire, whether formal duty bade, or cold propriety disallowed, my thanking you in this manner, as I am convinced, from the light in which you kindly view me, that you will do me the justice to believe this letter is not the manoeuvre of the needy, sharpening author, fastening on those in upper life, who honor him with a little notice of him or his works. Indeed, the situation of poets is generally such, to a proverb, as may, in some measure, palliate that prostitution of heart and talents they have at times been guilty of. I do not think prodigality is, by any means, a necessary concomitant of a poetic turn, but I believe a careless indolent attention to economy, is almost inseparable from it; then there must be in the heart of every bard of Nature's making a certain modest sensibility, mixed with a kind of pride, that will ever keep him out of the way of those wind-falls of fortune which frequently light on hardy impudence

and foot-licking servility. It is not easy to imagine a more helpless state than his whose poetic fancy unfits him for the world, and whose character as a scholar gives him some pretensions to the *politesse* of life—yet is as poor as I am.

For my part, I thank Heaven my star has been kinder; learning never elevated my ideas above the peasant's shed, and I have an independent fortune at the plough-tail.

I was surprised to hear that any one who pretended in the least to the manners of the gentleman should be so foolish, or worse, as to stoop to traduce the morals of such a one as I am, and so inhumanly cruel, too, as to meddle with that late most unfortunate, unhappy part of my story. With a tear of gratitude, I thank you, Sir, for the warmth with which you interposed in behalf of my conduct. I am, I acknowledge, too frequently the sport of whim, caprice, and passion; but reverence to God, and integrity to my fellow-creatures, I hope I shall ever preserve. I have no return, Sir, to make you for your goodness but one—a return which, I am persuaded, will not be unacceptable—the honest warm wishes of a grateful heart for your happiness, and every one of that lovely flock, who stand to you in a filial relation. If ever calumny aim the poisoned shaft at them, may friendship be by to ward the blow!

R. B.

To Dr. Blacklock.

Mauchline, November 15th, 1788.

REVEREND AND DEAR SIR,

As I hear nothing of your motions, but that you are, or were, out of town, I do not know where this may find you, or whether it will find you at all. I wrote you a long letter, dated from the land of Matrimony, in June; but either it had not found you, or, what I dread more, it found you or Mrs. Blacklock in too precarious a state of health and spirits to take notice of an idle packet.

I have done many little things for Johnson since I had the pleasure of seeing you; and I have finished one piece in the way of Pope's "Moral Epistles;" but, from your silence, I have every thing to fear, so I have only sent you two melancholy things, which I tremble lest they should too well suit the tone of your present feelings.

In a fortnight I move, bag and baggage, to Nithsdale; till then, my direction is at this place; after that period, it will be at Ellisland, near Dumfries. It would extremely oblige me were it but half a line, to let me know how you are, and where you are. Can I be indifferent to the fate of a man to whom I owe so much? A man whom I not only esteem, but venerate.

My warmest good wishes and most respectful compliments to Mrs. Blacklock, and Miss Johnson, if she is with you.

I cannot conclude without telling you that I am more and more pleased with the step I took respecting "my Jean." Two things, from my happy experience, I set down

as apophthegms in life—A wife's head is immaterial, compared with her heart; and—"Virtue's (for wisdom, what poet pretends to it?) ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." Adieu!

R. B.

[DR. BLACKLOCK]

TO

MR. GEORGE LAWRIE, V.D.M.,*

ST. MARGARET'S HILL, KILMARNOCK.

Edin., Sept. 4, 1786.

REVEREND AND DEAR SIR,

I OUGHT to have acknowledged your favor long ago, not only as a testimony of your kind remembrance, but as it gave me an opportunity of sharing one of the finest, and, perhaps, one of the most genuine entertainments of which the human mind is susceptible. A number of avocations retarded my progress in reading the poems; at last, however, I have finished that pleasing perusal. Many instances have I seen of Nature's force and beneficence exerted under numerous and formidable disadvantages; but none equal to that with which you have been kind enough to present me. There is a pathos and delicacy in his serious poems, a vein of wit and humour in those of a more festive turn, which cannot be too much admired, nor too warmly approved; and I think I shall never open the book without feeling my astonishment renewed and increased. It was my wish to have expressed my approbation in verse; but whether from declining life, or a temporary depression of spirits, it is at present out of my power to accomplish that agreeable intention.

Mr. Stewart, Professor of Morals in this University, had formerly read me three of the poems, and I had desired him to get my name inserted among the subscribers: but whether this was done, or not, I never could learn. I have little intercourse with Dr. Blair, but will take care to have the poems communicated to him by the intervention of some mutual friend. It has been told me by a gentleman, to whom I shewed the performances, and who sought a copy with diligence and ardour, that the whole impression is already exhausted. It were, therefore, much to be wished, for the sake of the young man, that a second edition, more numerous than the former, could immediately be printed; as it appears certain that its intrinsic merit, and the exertion of the author's friends, might give it a more universal circulation than any thing of the kind which has been published within my memory. * * * *

T. BLACKLOCK.

[* V.D.M.—i.e. Verbi Dei Minister; Minister of the Word of God—a formal style equivalent to Reverend, and assigned to gentlemen in the church long ago who had not yet attained the dignity of Doetorship in Divinity. Notices of Dr. Blacklock himself, so amiable, so gentle, and so unfortunate in his blindness, occur elsewhere in this edition.]

[This letter, certainly one of the most interesting documents connected with Scottish literary history, is now in the possession (1856) of the Rev. Balfour

Graham, minister of North Berwick, son-in-law of the late Rev. Archibald Lawrie, the son of Blacklock's correspondent.—*Chambers*. We entirely agree with Mr. Chambers as to the interest attaching to this modest, affectionate, and manly document, as the first formal critical recognition of Robert Burns, and first practical introduction of his name to the notice of the world; and assign it thus prominently, in equal type, a place in the correspondence of our Author himself with his Patrons. A copy of the letter was first forwarded by Mr. Lawrie to Gavin Hamilton, and by him communicated to Burns; among whose papers that copy was found.]

To

Ellisland, 22nd January, 1789.

SIR,

THERE are two things which, I believe, the blow that terminates my existence alone can destroy—my attachment and propensity to poesy, and my sense of what I owe to your goodness. There is nothing in the different situations of a Great and a Little man that vexes me more than the ease with which the one practises some virtues that to the other are extremely difficult, or perhaps wholly impracticable. A man of consequence and fashion shall richly repay a deed of kindness with a nod and a smile, or a hearty shake of the hand; while a poor fellow labours under a sense of gratitude, which, like copper coin, though it loads the bearer, is yet of small account in the currency and commerce of the world. As I have the honor, Sir, to stand in the poor fellow's predicament with respect to you, will you accept of a device I have thought on to acknowledge these obligations I can never cancel? Mankind, in general, agree in testifying their devotion, their gratitude, their friendship, or their love, by presenting whatever they hold dearest. Everybody who is in the least acquainted with the character of a poet, knows that there is nothing in the world on which he sets so much to time, as she may bestow her favors, to present you with the productions of my humble Muse. The enclosed are the principal of her works on the banks of the Nith. The poem inscribed to R. G., Esq., is some verses, accompanying a request, which I sent to Mr. Graham of Fintry—a gentleman who has given double value to some important favors he has bestowed on me by his manner of doing them, and on whose future patronage, likewise, I must depend for matters to me of the last consequence.

I have no great faith in the boastful pretensions to intuitive propriety and unlaboured elegance. The rough material of Fine Writing is certainly the gift of Genius; but I as firmly believe that the workmanship is the united effort of Pains, Attention, and Repeated-trial. The piece addressed to Mr. Graham is my first essay in that didactic, epistolary way; which circumstance, I hope, will bespeak your indulgence. To your friend Captain Erskine's strictures I lay claim as a relation; not, indeed, that I have the honor to be akin to the peerage, but because he is a son of Parnassus.

I intend being in Edinburgh in four or five weeks, when I shall certainly do myself the honor of waiting on you, to testify with what respect and gratitude, &c.

R. B.

[This letter is conjectured by Mr. Chambers, with probability, to have been addressed to Henry Erskine: whether ever sent is uncertain. It contains many good and true thoughts, in a somewhat formal style, and another among the many references which occur in our Author's correspondence to the Epistle addressed to Mr. Graham of Fintry.]

Supplementary.

[The following letters or notes to James Johnson, transcribed from originals, formerly in possession of Archibald Hastie, Esq., M.P. for Paisley, now in the British Museum, but hitherto inedited, have been politely placed at our disposal by Robert Carruthers, Esq., of the *Inverness Courier*. They came unfortunately a little too late to appear in their appropriate place, but we introduce them without hesitation here, that the series to which they belong (still imperfect, we have no doubt), may be supplemented as far as possible. Other memoranda for which we are indebted to Mr. Carruthers will be found elsewhere.]

[Supplement.]

To James Johnson.

(1.)

Ellisland, 24th April, 1789.

I HAVE sent you a list that I approve of; but I beg and insist that you will never allow my opinion to override yours.

[Supplement.]

TO JAMES JOHNSON.

(2.)

[No Date.]

I WAS much obliged to you, my dear friend, for making me acquainted with Gow. He is a modest, intelligent worthy, besides his being a man of great genius in his way. I have spent many happy hours with him in the short while he has been here.

Why did you not send me those tunes and verses that Clarke and you cannot make out? Let me have them as soon as possible, that while he is at hand I may settle the matter with him. He and I have been very busy providing and laying out materials for your fifth volume: I want no more. As soon as the bound copy of all the volumes is ready, take the trouble of forwarding it. In haste,

Yours ever, R. B.

[A very pleasant blink this is into the gauger's parlour at Dumfries, with the immortal composer of Scotch strathspeys at his elbow! labouring both, gratuitously and lovingly, for the honour of Scottish melody. It appears from our Author's Journal (see Appendix) that he had seen Neil Gow and heard him perform at Dunkeld, in August, 1787, and that he had also called at his house. It does not appear, however, that Neil Gow himself was at home—only 'Margaret Gow': and the probability is that Neil, to compensate for this disappointment, as well as for other reasons, had afterwards obtained an introduction to our Author from Johnson, with whom they were both intimately acquainted. Neil's visit to Dumfries might be in the October of 1792, when the Caledonian Hunt met there; or it might be later, perhaps in 1793—we have no satisfactory evidence in the meantime; but that such an interview as this took place is certain.]

[Supplement.]

TO JAMES JOHNSON.

(3.)

June 29th, [1794.]

I THANK you for your kind present of poor Riddel's book. Depend upon it that your fifth volume shall not be forgotten. * * * I have just been getting three or four songs for your book. Pray will you let me know how many and what are the songs Urbani has borrowed from your Museum.

Yours,

R. B.

[It is enough to remark that these letters show the very reverse of negligence or niggardliness on Johnson's part, so far as copies of the Museum are concerned. Compare note to letter (5), p. 80.]

Poetical Epistles

ADDRESSED TO ROBERT BURNS,

And referred to in foregoing Correspondence.

FROM JANET LITTLE:

DAIRY-MAID TO MRS. DUNLOP.

[Referred to in Letter (23) to Mrs. Dunlop, p. 20.]

Loudoun House, 12th July, 1789.

Fair fa' the honest rustic swain,
The pride o' a' our Scottish plain:
Thou gies us joy to hear thy strain,
And notes sae sweet:
Old Ramsay's shade revived again
In thee we greet.

Loved Thalia, that delightful muse,
Seem'd lang shut up as a recluse;
To all she did her aid refuse

Since Allan's day,
Till Burns arose, then did she choose
To grace his lay.

To hear thy sang all ranks desire,
Sae weel you strike the dormant lyre;
Apollo with poetic fire
Thy breast does warm,
And critics silently admire
Thy art to charm.

Cæsar and Luath weel can speak,
'Tis pity e'er their gabs should steek,
But into human nature keek,
And knots unravel:
To hear their lectures once a-week,
Nine miles I'd travel.

Thy dedication to G. H.,
An' unco bonnie hamespun speech,
Wi' winsome glee the heart can teach
A better lesson,
Than servile bards who fan and fleech
Like beggar's messan.

When slighted love becomes your theme,
And woman's faithless vows you blame,
With so much pathos you exclaim,
In your Lament;
But glanced by the most rigid dame,
She would relent.

The daisy, too, ye sing wi' skill,
And weel ye praise the whisky gill:
In vain I blunt my feckless quill
Your fame to raise;
While Echo sounds from ilka hill
To Burns's praise.

Did Addison or Pope but hear,
Or Sam, that critic most severe,
A ploughboy sing with throat sae clear,
They in a rage
Their works would a' in pieces tear,
And curse your page.

Sure Milton's eloquence were faint
The beauties of your verse to paint:
My rude unpolish'd strokes but taint
Their brilliancy;
Th' attempt would doubtless vex a saint,
And weel may thee.

The task I'll drop—with heart sincere
To Heaven present my humble pray'r,
That all the blessings mortals share
May be by turns
Dispensed by an indulgent care,
To Robert Burns!

[Janet Little, born near Ecclefechan, 1759: died at Loudoun Castle, 1813. She published a small volume of poems in 1792, dedicated to the then Countess of Loudoun.]

FROM DR. BLACKLOCK.

[Referred to in Letter to Dr. Anderson, p. 118.]

Edinburgh, 1st September, 1790.

How does my dear friend, much I languish to hear,
His fortune, relations, and all that are dear?
With love of the Muses so strongly still smitten,
I meant this epistle in verse to have written;
But from age and infirmity indolence flows,
And this, much I fear, will restore me to prose.
Anon to my business I wish to proceed,
Dr. Anderson guides and provokes me to speed,
A man of integrity, genius, and worth,
Who soon a performance intends to set forth;
A work miscellaneous, extensive, and free,
Which will weekly appear by the name of the *Bee*.
Of this from himself I enclose you a plan,
And hope you will give what assistance you can.
Entangled with business, and haunted with care,
In which more or less human nature must share,
Some moments of leisure the Muses will claim,
A sacrifice due to amusement and fame.
The *Bee*, which sucks honey from ev'ry gay bloom,
With some rays of your genius her work may illumine,
Whilst the flow'r whence her honey spontaneously flows,
As fragrantly smells, and as vig'rously grows.

Now with kind gratulations 'tis time to conclude,
And add, your promotion is here understood;
Thus free from the servile employ of excise, Sir,
We hope soon to hear you commence Supervisor;
You then more at leisure, and free from controul,
May indulge the strong passion that reigns in your soul.
But I, feeble I, must to nature give way;
Devoted cold death's, and longevity's prey.
From verses tho' languid my thoughts must unbend,
Tho' still I remain your affectionate friend,

THO. BLACKLOCK.

POETICAL EPISTLE TO BURNS,

BY THE

REV. JOHN SKINNER.

O! HAPPY hour for ever mair,
That led my Chill up Cha'mers' stair,
And gae him, what he values sair,
Sae braw a skance
Of Ayr-shire's dainty Poet there,
By lucky chance.

Waes my auld heart I was na wi' you,
Tho' worth your while I cou'd na gie you,
But sin' I had na hap to see you
When ye was North,
I'm bauld to send my service to you
Hyne o'er the Forth.

Sae proud 's I am that ye hae heard
O' my attempts to be a Bard,
And thinks my muse nae that ill far'd
Seil o' your face!
I wad na wiss for mair reward
Than your good grace.

Your bonnie bookie, line by line
I've read, and think it freely fine:
Indeed, I darena ca't *divine*,
As others might;
For that, ye ken, frae pen like mine,
Wad no be right.

But, by my sang, I dinna wonner,
That your admirers, mony hunner,
Let gowkit flieps pretend to scunner
And tak' offence;
Ye've naething said that looks like blunner
To fowks o' sense.

Your pawky "Dream" has humour in't,
I never saw the like in print;
The birth-day Laurit durst na mint
As ye hae dane;
And yet there's nae a single hint
Can be mista'en.

Your "Maillie," and your guid "Auld Mare,"
And "Hallow-even's" funny cheer;
There's nane that's read them, far or near,
But reezes Robie,
And thinks them as diverting gear
As Yorick's Tobie.

But, O! the weel tauld "Cotter's Night"
Is what gies me the maist delight:
A piece sae finished, and sae tight,
There's nane o's a'
Cou'd preachment-timmer cleaner dight
In kirk nor ha'.

But what need this or that to name?
It's own'd by a' there's no a theme
Ye tak' in hand, but's a' the same,
And nae ane o' them
But weel may challenge a' the fame
That we can gi' them.

For me, I heartily allow you
The wald o' praise sae justly due you:
And but a Plowman! Sall I true you?
Gin it be sae,
A miracle I will avow you,
Deny't wha may.

What recks a leash o' classic lair,
Thro' seven years, and some guide mair;
When plowman-lad, wi' nature bare,
Sae far surpasses
A' we can do wi' study sair
To climb Parnassus.

But, thanks to praise, ye're i' your prime,
And may chant on this lang, lang time;
For, let me tell you, 'twere a erime
To hadd your tongue,
Wi' sic a knack's ye hae at rhyme,
And you sae young.

Ye ken it's nae for ane like me
To be sae droll as ye can be:
But only help that I can gie,
Tho't be but sma',
Your least command, I'se let you see,
Sall gar me draw.

An hour or twa, by hook or crook,
And may be three, some orrow owk
That I can spare frae haly buik,
(For that's my hobby,)
I'll steal awa' to some hy-neuk,
And crack wi' Robie.

Wad ye but only crack again,
Just what ye like, in ony strain,
I'll tak it kind; for, to be plain,
I do expect it;
And, mair than that, I'll no be fain
Gin ye neglect it.

To LINSHART, gin my name ye spier,
Whare I hae heftt near fifty year,
'Twill come in course, ye need na fear;
The pairt's weel kent;
And postage, be it cheap or dear
I'll pay content.

Now, after a', hae me exqueez'd
For wishing nae to be refecz'd;
I dinna covet to be reez'd
For this fiel lilt;
But fiel or wise, gin ye be pleas'd,
Ye're welcome till't.

Sae, canty Plowman, fare ye weel;
Lord bless ye lang wi' hae and heil,
And keep you aye the honest ehie!
That ye hae been;
Syne lift you to a better biel
Whane this is dane!

POSTSCRIPT.

This auld Scots muse I've courted lang,
And spar'd nae pains to win her;
Dowff tho' I be in rustie sang,
I'm no a late beginner.
But now auld age taks dowie turns,
Yet troth, as I'm a sinner,
I'll aye be fond of ROBIE BURNS,
While I can sign

JOHN SKINNER.

Linshart, Sept. 25th, 1787.