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CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN BURNS AND CLARINDA.*

PART I.

"I ahiver, Spirit fierce and bold,
At thought of what I now behold."—*Wordsworth at the Grave of Burns.*

It must be with a strange and almost painful mixture of awe and curiosity, reverence and apprehension, that those admirers of Burns who are conversant with his private history, will venture to open a volume which reveals what has been a mystery for the last half century; and which remained the last to be unveiled, connected with that man who, whatever were his errors, must ever hold the first place in the poetic literature as in the national heart of Scotland. They have not studied nor comprehended aright the mingled elements of one of the noblest natures ever shrouded in the garb of frail mortality who can separate the Man from the Poet. His whole life speaketh. Burns and his poems are "one and indivisible"; and to lower the one is to impair the brightness and charm of the other. It was imagined that the world had already heard the very worst that could be told of him; and often much more than the worst, if truth be tested either by profound and humble self-knowledge, or by enlightened conscience:—And now again, his inmost life is fully laid bare, and the most pharisaical pretender or over-strained moralist challenged to another scrutiny. But in the spirit of the divine words, "Let him that is without sin among you throw the first stone." This is, perhaps, stating the case too gravely. But for two generations there had been whisperings and mutterings about this mysterious, if not sinful correspondence, a part of which had been surreptitiously published forty years since, and immediately suppressed; and detached fragments of it had powerfully whetted curiosity. There was, besides, something extremely piquant in imagining of that stalwart Ploughman, with his glowing eyes and sincere and earnest soul; that man of indomitable pride and burning passions, philanthropizing under the gentle appellation of *Sylvander*, with some romantic Edinburgh dame yeleft *Clarinda*; while some even of those who revered and all but worshipped the memory of the Poet and the Man, were apprehensive that Burns, in this side and foolish correspondence, might perhaps appear not alone

"Mialed by Fancy's meteor ray,
By Passion driven"—

but as a deliberate, if not cold-blooded seducer.

From the fragments of the correspondence published, Allan Cunningham inferred that there was no depth of passion, no serious feeling on the side of Burns. And to conceive of the author of that one stanza in the *Cotter's Saturday Night*, beginning,

"If Heaven one draught of heavenly pleasure spare," and of hundreds of love-songs, the thrilling tenderness, and passionate warmth of which are not surpassed by their delicacy and purity—to conceive of him as the pursuer of a vulgar *bonne fortune*—of a frivolous passing intrigue in which the heart had no share, was as humiliating as painful. Happily the fully published correspondence banishes every apprehension of this sort. There is, indeed, something to blame, and much to regret, but nothing nearly so bad as was imagined. The reputation of Burns would certainly not have been lessened although the correspondence had been altogether suppressed. Yet he can sustain and surmount the shock of the worst of these revelations; and if the character of *Clarinda* is vindicated—the avowed object of her grandson, in the publication of these Letters—Burns is not condemned. As to whether or not the object of that gentleman is gained, there will be a great diversity of opinion.

Our own impression on opening the book was, that the whole was a very foolish and equivocal affair; but as it proceeds, and the mutual feelings of the parties deepen into something like genuine tenderness, and close in mellowed kindness and truly "friendly feelings," it assumes a more respectable character; and *Clarinda*, in particular, appears much more worthy of the attachment of a sensible man of genius at the close than at the commencement of the correspondence.—Though the lady is the avowed subject of the book, we presume that all the world, in common with ourselves, will think mainly of Burns in perusing it. It reveals an entanglement into which the inflammable bard was led by an indiscreet, but attractive woman, placed in a situation which must have strongly interested the sympathies of a man whose pity and tenderness were as excitable as his passions. It may be deemed paradoxical, if not worse, to say, that if the attachment of Burns to this lady had been deeper-rooted, more ardent and impassioned, he would, with the high and romantic order of minds, more readily have found both sympathy and forgiveness. But there was, at least at the

* The Correspondence between Burns and Clarinda. With a Memoir of Mrs. M'Lehose, (Clarinda.) Arranged and Edited by her Grandson, W. C. M'Lehose. Post octavo, pp. 297. Edinburgh: Tait; London: Simpkin, Marshall, & Co.; and Dublin: John Cumming.

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commencement of the correspondence, a good deal of affectation, and of the mock-heroic on the part of him who was essentially the most sincere of men. Burns was still a young man, and always rather boastful of his warm devotion to the sex; and it was necessary, the plunge once made, gallantly to support the part of *Sylveander* with a volunteer *Clarinda*, of whose admiration any young man would likely have been vain, whatever might have been his sober opinion of his romantic admirer. A lady, a warm admirer of the poet, who had seen some of the Letters surreptitiously published long ago and immediately suppressed, in half questioning their authenticity, is reported to have said, "If Burns had been in love with me, he would not have addressed to me letters like these." There was truth as well as proper self-respect in the female criticism. Neither would he have addressed many parts of these high-flown, hyperbolical epistles to Highland Mary or Jean Armour,—indeed, in their case the supposition is absurd; but neither to Margaret Chalmers, Charlotte Hamilton, nor to any one of the accomplished young women with whom he corresponded, would he have addressed them. There was but one *Clarinda*; and the correspondence with her has at least the merit of showing another phase of his mind. The letters of Burns to women are among the finest of his compositions; true, confiding, natural, sensible, nay refined. What a precious treasure his genuine letters to any woman he really loved, must have been!—but, so far as we yet know, none such exist. His real love-passages were generally by "word-of-mouth;" and we have, instead, his flighty and exaggerated epistles to *Clarinda*, interspersed with many fine thoughts and beautiful sentiments, that may, however, occasionally be found in his common-place books. There are also bold and strange passages in these letters, which the daring rustic never durst have addressed to the humblest woman who, though devoted to him with her whole soul, while respecting herself, tacitly taught him to respect while he loved her. Something, in reference to *Clarinda*, is said about that great scapegoat the manners of the age. But genuine delicacy, the exquisite sense of propriety—we mean not the prudish counterfeit—are ever much more connected with individual character than existing manners or education. Delicacy is an intuitive quality,—native-born with the man or woman; not easily to be unlearned, never to be taught.

But our remarks on this singular Correspondence, commencing in vanity and idle gallantry, but ending far better than might reasonably have been anticipated, cannot be understood without some preliminary explanation.—All the world knows under what circumstances the Poet came to Edinburgh in 1786, where he remained the greater part of a year, printing his poems, and sustaining, with the characteristic good sense and self-knowledge which, as much as high genius, distinguished him, the part of a very wonderful *Lion*. It is also known, that previous to this time, his connexion with his future wife, Jean Armour, had been harshly terminated by the unjustifiable severity of her father, and her own weakness.

During his first visit to Edinburgh, Burns knew nothing of Mrs. M'Lehose, *alias* *Clarinda*. When he went back to Ayrshire, now a "famous man" in the eyes of his former friends, with the most dazzling, if vague prospects, he had neither seen nor heard of her, though all the world of Edinburgh had rung with him. Many of his letters and poems, but above all, his exquisite *Lament*, bear testimony to the fervency and constancy of his first fondness for "Bonnie Jean," and to the agony which her weakness, or improper submission to tyrannical paternal authority, which he felt as heartlessness and faithlessness, caused him. It was not, in this case, the mere separation of two fond, young, innocent lovers, by the prudence of friends; but those whom God had joined together were forcibly disunited,—the wife consenting, or seeming to consent. But a year most memorable in the history of Burns had rolled by; and he was now a richer and wiser, if not a better man. He had also seen other phases of womanhood than those which his native rustic society presented; and though it might, in some degree, be true of him in many of his flames, "out of sight, out of mind," the impression left on his heart by her whom he had once fondly regarded as his wife might have been weakened, but certainly was not eradicated when he went back to Mauchline. Yet, after what had passed, he could not seriously have entertained any idea of renewing the intercourse. How much of heart and natural character are seen in his exclamations to his confidential correspondents about the conduct of Jean at the miserable period when it seemed doubly ungenerous to break with him! To one friend whom he respected, he writes:—"Would you believe it? Though I had not a hope nor even a wish to make her mine, after her conduct; yet when he [Mr. Aitken] told me the names were all out of the paper, my heart died within me, and he cut my veins with the news. Perdition seize her falsehood!" This paper is imagined to have been a mutual acknowledgment of a marriage signed by both parties. To another correspondent he says:—"Poor Armour is come back to Mauchline, [after her confinement;] and I went to call on her, and her mother forbade me the house; nor did she herself express much sorrow for what she had done. I have already appeared publicly in church. I do this to get a certificate as a *bachelor*." To a third friend he says:—"Poor, ill-advised, ungrateful Armour came home on Friday last. You have heard all the particulars of that affair; and a black affair it is. What she thinks of her conduct now, I don't know. One thing I know, she has made me completely miserable. Never man loved, or rather adored a woman more than I did her; and to confess a truth between you and me, I do still love her to distraction after all: though I won't tell her so, though I were to see her, which I don't want to do. My poor, dear, unfortunate Jean! how happy have I been in thy arms! It is not the losing her that makes me so unhappy, but for her sake I feel most severely: I foresee she is on the road to, I am afraid, eternal ruin. May Almighty God

forgive her ingratitude and perjury to me, as I from my very soul forgive her; and may his grace be with her, and bless her in all her future life! I have no nearer idea of the place of eternal punishment than what I have felt in my own breast on her account. . . . And now for a grand cure. The ship is on her way home that is to take me out to Jamaica; and then farewell, dear old Scotland! and farewell, dear ungrateful Jean! for never will I see you more!"

There were here the force and sincerity of an affection not soon to be obliterated. But before many months elapsed, the change came. Burns, certificated as a bachelor by "Daddy Auld," was living in Edinburgh, caressed by lords and ladies, and for the moment the most famous peasant man in all Scotland; and the image of "dear ungrateful Jean" for the time laid half to sleep, in that large and burning heart, capable of receiving all strong and noble impressions, and of parting with none. It is related by one of his many biographers—we think by Mr. Robert Chambers—that after he returned to Ayrshire, and had been for some time at Moss-giel, and in the neighbourhood of "Bonny Jean," without desiring to see her, he chanced to be one day drinking with some "social billies" in John Dow's inn in Mauchline, which was close to the residence of Jean's father, and encountered her by chance in the court behind the inn, and was (like, we imagine, Heloise on the sight of the handwriting of Abelard) immediately inflamed with all his former passion. Their stolen interviews were renewed. Jean again found herself "as ladies wish to be, &c.;" and towards the end of the year, and exactly when the Poet's correspondence with Clarinda commenced, she was turned out of doors by her incensed parents. She went to Ardrossan, where Burns, we learn from his letters, had provided a refuge for her. He must probably have been aware of her condition before he left Ayrshire; or, at all events, though Jean may have been no great penwoman like Clarinda, some friend must have apprized him of her destitution and misery. He was at this time unable to go to comfort her, to which his generous heart must have prompted him; both because the main object of his coming to Edinburgh, the settlement of his accounts with his tardy publisher, was unaccomplished, and that latterly he was confined to his chamber by a severely bruised limb. A few days before this accident, Burns chanced to meet with Mrs. M'Lehose at a tea-party in the house of his friend Miss Nimmo, who, though apparently a new acquaintance of the lady, was a very near neighbour of hers. Mrs. M'Lehose had taken considerable pains to obtain the Poet's acquaintance; and there must have been a dash of romance and flirtation even at their first meeting. A card of invitation to tea with Mrs. M'Lehose followed; and the first note from Burns which we see in the Correspondence, is one accepting the invitation; and his second, written in a more gallant vein, and with a touch of his poetical calling, and the stilted style which young poets are bound to employ to pretty women, tells of the accident which deprived him of the very great pleasure by which he had set so much store.

We do not see that Miss Nimmo had been included in this invitation. Mrs. M'Lehose immediately replied, with eager sympathy for the Bard's misfortune; and the brisk correspondence had reached a pretty high temperature before the parties had ever met, save at that fatal tea-drinking, where the mischievous sylphs, unseen, presided. It is, indeed, problematic if they ever once met in daylight.

Clarinda must at this time have considered Burns a *free*, not merely an unmarried, but a disengaged man; and he knew that she was "an ill-married lady;" a woman worse than widowed, and nothing more. Clarinda's maiden name was Agnes Craig. She was the daughter of a surgeon in Glasgow, and very respectably connected. At the age of ten she lost her mother; and, when barely thirteen, her elder and married sister. These were heavy misfortunes to a handsome and lively coquettish girl; vain and wilful, though possessed of many engaging qualities. Her grandson, in the biographical notice prefixed to the Correspondence, alludes to the imperfect education of girls at that period. But it is probable that the education of Agnes Craig was, at least, as good as that of her unknown contemporaries, Elizabeth Hamilton or Mrs. Grant of Laggan; while her social advantages in early life must have been much superior to theirs: but she eminently required, and altogether wanted, a mother's gentle restraint and tender guidance; and her subsequent misfortunes may be fully as much attributed to this circumstance as to her own imprudence. But it is time that we were citing our authority. Mr. M'Lehose executes stern, relentless justice upon his grandfather, in earnestly vindicating the character of his grandmother; and we confess that the worthless progenitor richly deserves unmitigated reprobation,—though it is not unlikely that his gay, young, coquettish wife may have plagued him not a little:—

From the death of her sister, till her marriage, she lived with her father; except that, for half a year, when fifteen years old, she was sent to an Edinburgh boarding-school—a practice apparently prevalent in those days as well as now—to finish that education which could not be said to have been properly begun, and had no solid foundation. This circumstance originated an acquaintance which ended in her marriage. Even at this early age, she was considered one of the beauties of Glasgow, and was styled "the pretty Miss Nancy." Mr. James M'Lehose, a young man of respectable connexions, and a law agent in that city, had been disappointed in getting introduced to her; and when he learned that she was going to Edinburgh, he engaged all the seats in the stage-coach, excepting the one taken for her. At that period the coach took the whole day to perform the journey between the two cities, stopping a considerable time for dinner on the road, which thus afforded Mr. M'Lehose an excellent opportunity of making himself agreeable,—an opportunity which he took the utmost pains to improve, and with great success, being possessed of an agreeable and attractive person, and most insinuating manners. His deficiency of sound principle was hidden from general observation by great plausibility. After the return of "the pretty Miss Nancy" to Glasgow, Mr. M'Lehose followed up the acquaintance thus commenced, by paying her the most assiduous attention, and thus succeeded in winning her affections. Being young and inexperienced, deprived of the counsels of a mother and sister, and attached to one whom she thought possessed of every virtue, and who had shown so decided a partiality to her in a manner peculiarly calculated to please a romantic mind,—she favourably received his addresses.

In this she was not encouraged by her friends, who thought that her beauty, talents, and connexions, entitled her to a superior match. However, she became Mrs. M'Lehose in July 1776, being then only seventeen years of age, and her husband five years her senior. Their union, she always stated, was the result of disinterested affection on both sides. But this connexion proved the bane of her happiness, and the source of all her misfortunes. Married at so early an age, before the vivacity of youth was passed, and, indeed, before it was fully developed, possessed of considerable personal attractions, a ready flow of wit, a keen relish for society, in which her conversational powers fitted her to excel, and a strong love of admiration, she appears to have displeased her husband, because she could not at once forego those enjoyments so natural to her time of life and situation. And he, without any cause, seems to have conceived the most unworthy jealousy; which led him to treat her with a severity most injudicious, and, to one of her disposition, productive of the worst consequences.

She soon discovered the mistaken estimate she had formed of her husband's character; and being of a high, sanguine spirit, could ill brook the unmerited bad treatment she received. To use her own words, in a statement which she afterwards made for the advice of her friends—"Only a short time had elapsed ere I perceived, with inexpressible regret, that our dispositions, tempers, and sentiments, were so totally different, as to banish all hopes of happiness. Our disagreements rose to such a height, and my husband's treatment was so harsh, that it was thought advisable by my friends a separation should take place: which accordingly followed in December, 1780."

Mrs. M'Lehose had at this period only two children living—having lost her first born. A fourth was born a few months after this separation. Soon after this event, her husband took her infant children away from her, in the hopes of thereby working on her maternal feelings, and forcing a reunion which she had firmly refused, being convinced that they could not live happily together. She parted with her children with extreme reluctance—her father being both able and willing to maintain her and them; while her husband had neglected his business, and entered into every species of dissipation, so that he became unable to maintain his children, and they were distributed among his relations,—the youngest infant being, as soon as possible, removed from the tender care of his mother, and committed to the charge of a hiring nurse. He even prohibited her from seeing the children, to whom he knew she was devotedly attached. It required the utmost fortitude, on her part, to bear this cruel deprivation; but, by enduring it, she rendered her husband's cruel attempt abortive. All the children died young, except the late A. C. M'Lehose, W.S.

Immediately after the separation, she had returned to her father's house with her children, where she remained till his death, in the year 1782, two years afterwards. He judiciously left his property to be invested in an annuity for her behoof, entirely independent of her husband, and beyond his control; and feeling it unpleasant to remain in the same city with her husband and his relations, and yet in a state of alienation, Mrs. M'Lehose, by the advice of her friends, removed to Edinburgh in the same year, 1782.

Her husband followed her soon after, on his way to London, having formed an intention of going abroad. He solicited an interview in these terms—"Early to-morrow morning I leave this country for ever, and therefore wish much to pass one quarter of an hour with you. Upon my word of honour, my dearest Nancy, it is the last night you probably will ever have an opportunity of seeing me in this world." This appeal she refused for the following reasons:—"I consulted my friends: they advised me against seeing him; and as I thought it could be productive of no good, I declined the interview." The treatment she received from her husband while living with him, must have been bad indeed, to make one of her forgiving disposition so unyielding; and he seems to have been not altogether insensible to his misconduct: for, two years later, and just previous to going abroad,

he wrote to his wife—"For my own part, I am willing to forget what is past; neither do I require any apology from you: for I am heartily sorrow for those instances of my behaviour to you which caused our separation. Were it possible to recall them, they should never be repeated." These feelings may have been sincere at the moment, but they had no depth or endurance.

It would appear that, on coming to Edinburgh, Mrs. M'Lehose had left her infants among her husband's relations; yet she seems to have been an affectionate mother. From London, whither he had gone, her husband wrote her an upbraiding letter, telling her, however, that he had got the prospect of employment abroad, and adding—

"The sooner you return to Glasgow the better, and take under your care and protection those endearing pledges of our once-happier days, as none of my friends will have anything to do with them." After speaking of his prospects of employment, he added—"Yet still, however remote my residence may be from you and those endearing infants, God forbid that I should be so destitute of natural affection for them, as to permit you or them, in the smallest degree, to be burdensome to any of your friends. On the contrary, I shall at all times observe the strictest economy, and exert myself to the uttermost, so that I may be enabled to contribute to your ease and happiness."

It will be seen in the sequel how this fair promise was observed. The truth is, that as he could not prevail on his wife to live with him, even by depriving her of her children, to whom she was tenderly attached, and his relations would no longer support him in idleness, or his children for his sake, their sympathy for him being blunted, if not deadened, by his misconduct,—he thus contrived to throw the burden of them on his young wife, whose patrimonial income was very limited. Her situation at this trying period is thus related:—"The income left me by my father being barely sufficient to board myself, I was now distressed how to support my three infants. With my spirits sunk in deep dejection, I went to Glasgow to see them. I found arrears due for their board. This I paid; and the goodness of some worthy gentlemen in Glasgow procuring me a small annuity from the writers, and one from the surgeons, I again set out for Edinburgh with them in August 1782; and, by the strictest economy, made my little income go as far as possible. The deficiency was always supplied by some worthy benevolent friends, whose kindness no time can erase from my grateful heart."

In her cousin, afterwards elevated to the bench by the title of Lord Craig, but then an advocate at the Scottish bar, Mrs. M'Lehose found a steady and generous friend to the end of his life; nor do we believe that he, at any period, was that friend who aspired to be something more,—which she intimates of some one in her letters to Burns,—and whose tenderness she could not return. Let us now see what were the tastes and habits of the ill-married wife. They were those of no commonplace woman of sixty years since; and though traced by what must be, and perhaps ought to be, a partial pen, the description must be substantially correct. Her "cultivation of the muses" would be esteemed a small affair nowadays; but a woman at that period, of the middle rank, who wrote lines beginning with capital letters, and with rhymes tagged to the end of them, was quite a prodigy. Yet Burns, when he got up raptures—as in duty bound, both as a gallant and a poet—over the verses of Clarinda, must sometimes have gone, as he says somewhere of another lady's verses, "agonizing over the belly of his conscience." He must then have known that *Hardyknote*, and the *Flowers of*

the Forest, and probably *Auld Robin Gray*, were each the compositions of natives of Scotland without beards.

During Mrs. M'Lehose's early residence in Edinburgh, when she had not joined that social circle of which she soon became an ornament, she devoted much time and attention to remedying the defects of her early education. She improved her taste by the study of the best English authors, and became proficient in English composition. Possessed of a most retentive memory, she often quoted aptly from those authors, both in conversation and in her correspondence, which afterwards became extensive, and in which she excelled. It is to be regretted that so little of that correspondence has been preserved; but Mrs. M'Lehose having survived nearly all the friends of her early life, applications made in quarters where it was supposed her letters might have been preserved, have been unsuccessful.

It was at this period, also, that Mrs. M'Lehose began cultivating the Muses. She produced many short poetical effusions, a few of which have been preserved, and are inserted in this volume.

In the rearing and education of her children she took great delight; and the society of the many friends she acquired yielded her constant enjoyment for a long series of years.

In another place we are told that Mrs. M'Lehose was, for forty years, in company five days (or nights) a-week out of the seven; and felt the change of habits which the death of her friends and her own old age occasioned, as a great privation. But before she went so much abroad, it is probable that her children were either dead, or that the sole survivor, the father of her biographer, was grown beyond the need of her care. Edinburgh ladies of the middle rank were, in those times, nearly tied down to the everlasting tea-table. As yet all sorts of lectures and religious meetings, and tract-distributing, and money-gathering recreations, were unknown among them. This change of manners, whatever its passing effects may be, is silently working a beneficial and great change in the social position of the women in Scotland. Called upon at a great crisis to assist and coöperate with their spiritual masters in working out certain favourite objects, they ought surely to follow the example of the Irish Volunteers, and not ground their arms till they have obtained something for themselves and their sex.

Mrs. M'Lehose had been, for five years, living in Edinburgh in the way described, when Burns was suddenly heard of,—the theme of every tea-table, as well as the welcome guest of many of what are called "the best houses." His fashionable vogue was, however, on the wane before she, on his second and diminished appearance as a Lion, became acquainted with him; though it was apparently fashion that drew her towards him, fond as she was of poetry. In the early period of their acquaintance, though she must have had knowledge of some of his most popular pieces, she had not even read his poems; for she tells him in one letter, "I have your poems in loan just now. I've read them many times; and with new pleasure. Some time I will give you my opinion of them severally."

Clarinda, besides being a wit and a poetess, was "decidedly pious;" and she appears to have been, at this time, under the spiritual direction of a Mr. or Dr. Kemp, who, long afterwards, occasioned a terrible half-stifled *secundare* in the religious circles of

Edinburgh,—it being alleged that, with the warmest regard for the souls of pretty women, his devotees, he united no less *tendresse* for their persons. We have no intention to revert to this stale gossip, save as it illustrates the character of the converter, to what are called evangelical principles, of the lady, who, in her turn, was ambitious of turning Robert Burns from infidelity or scepticism—though he never was either infidel or sceptic—to high Calvinism.

We have said that not homage to illustrious genius, but something very like sheer vanity—the desire of a lady who made verses, to become acquainted with a poet so much courted and distinguished in high society—seems to us to have been Mrs. M'Lehose's original motive for wishing to know, and to charm Burns. But no means had been found to gratify this not unnatural ambition, until she got acquainted with her neighbour Miss Nimmo. This lady seems to have been a weak, simple-minded, kind-hearted spinster, familiar in one respectable circle in which the poet was highly valued, and which included the family of Mr. Crawford Tait, and the poet's correspondent, Miss Margaret Chalmers. Poor Miss Nimmo, evidently a new friend, seems soon to have taken alarm at the dilemma in which she had placed herself by her rash introduction, and the vehement sentimental flirtation that had its origin at her decorous tea-table. When evil tongues grew busy with the name of Clarinda, she seems to have dropped the acquaintance; and Burns administers consolation for the loss of her friendship, more haughty than reasonable. But lest our love and reverence for the Man, with all his failings, should be thought to betray us into injustice to the lady, we shall let our authority, Mr. M'Lehose, relate the exact circumstances in which this Platonic attachment originated.

Towards the end of the year 1787, Robert Burns was introduced to Mrs. M'Lehose, in the house of a mutual friend, Miss Nimmo. They spent the evening together; and we have the sentiments recorded by both parties of the impressions reciprocally produced. The poet declared, in one of his letters to her, "Of all God's creatures I ever could approach in the beaten way of friendship, you struck me with the deepest, the strongest, the most permanent impression." While she wrote:—"Miss Nimmo can tell you how earnestly I had long pressed her to make us acquainted. I had a presentiment that we would derive pleasure from the society of each other." The poet was at this time preparing to depart from Edinburgh; and, under these circumstances, could only regret that he had not possessed the opportunity of cultivating the lady's acquaintance earlier; but a severe accident, which happened a day or two later, when he was engaged to spend the evening with her, delayed his departure for some time, and led to a correspondence, in which Mrs. M'Lehose fancifully adopted the name of "Clarinda," and Burns followed up the idea by signing "Sylvander." As soon as he recovered from his accident, the poet visited the lady, and they enjoyed much of each other's society for several months, till he left Edinburgh. They met only once afterwards, in the year 1791,—but occasionally corresponded till within a short period of his death.

Dates are often plaguy and perplexing things; and we have felt it so, in comparing those of the letters of Burns to his other friends, with those to Clarinda. We know how Jean Armour was

situated at this time, and her claims upon the generosity and kindness of Burns; and yet, not long before, he had avowed ardent admiration, and, according to the not improbable hypothesis of Allan Cunningham, experienced a much warmer sentiment for Charlotte Hamilton, which it only required a little encouragement from the "Fairest Maid on Devon's banks," to foster into a permanent attachment. Fortunately for all parties, if this were the fact, that encouragement was not given. She, perhaps, from the first preferred his companion Adair, to whom she was subsequently married; nor do we imagine that Burns was so far entangled, as to have felt deep despair at the disappointment of hopes that could only have been transitory. Although there had been no "Bonnie Jean" in existence, with, alas!

"Her girdle all too jimp,"

Burns, without settled prospects, or visible means of supporting "genteel" life, was in no condition to pay serious addresses to Miss Hamilton, even with all the proud consciousness of that genius on which Fame had now set her golden stamp.

"There is," says Allan Cunningham, "no positive evidence that he paid his addresses to the 'Fairest Maid on Devon's banks;' but he did much to render himself acceptable to her; and, in an oblique way of making his approach, he strove, and not without success, to merit the good opinion of her companion, Margaret Chalmers. . . . I can give but an imperfect account of the progress of the poet's passion: for some twelve or thirteen of his most carefully-written and gently-expressed letters, were, in an evil hour, thrown into the fire by Charlotte Hamilton; and all the record we have, is his songs, and what is contained in his correspondence with Margaret Chalmers."

This record seems to have been preserved in his own foul copies of letters, or in scraps and memorandums. It would be curious to know at what time Miss Hamilton threw the letters either indignantly or contemptuously into the fire. Whether it was when Miss Nimmo's and the Edinburgh gossip about Clarinda first reached the ears of the offended beauty; or at the after-period, when Clarinda herself branded the faithless bard with the name of "villain," because he had, like an honest man, made poor Jean Armour an honest woman. Clarinda, however, had the good taste not to destroy his letters, ill as, we apprehend, they atone for the loss of those addressed to the Heloise and Clara at Harvieston. Rousseau, when the eloquent series of letters which, during the paroxysms of his grand passion, he had addressed to the object of it—a lady who was the wife of one man and the mistress of another—were demanded back, and averred to be destroyed, exclaims, that no woman who had inspired such a passion could, by any possibility, destroy the proofs of its existence. But this is man's vanity. Eloquent proofs of the passion or of the genius of Burns were destroyed, and by a woman who had no reason to be ashamed of the correspondence; and those Clarinda held were faithfully preserved to see the light after many days. She would never consent to their publication; she

refused the solicitations of Mr. Syme, one of Burns' voluntary executors, to let them appear in the *Life* that was then to be written by Dr. Currie: but she offered to make extracts herself; of which, however, Dr. Currie, it appears, has thought it best not to avail himself. And he was right. The time, if it be come now, was not then come; and the memory of the Bard had to contend with sufficient obloquy without this delicate affair.* Mrs. McLehose again, in 1834, refused these Letters to Allan Cunningham, when he, in very flattering terms, begged for them as an unique ornament to his edition of the works of Burns. Still she could not destroy them. When the first of the series was written, Burns had been chilled, if not repelled, by Charlotte Hamilton; and he must also have been distracted, though not clear or fixed in his future views, as to "darling Jean." His inflammable heart was, therefore, at this critical period, without any ostensible tenant; or any secondary occupant to form the resting-place of roving Fancy, or the vantage-ground from which Imagination might wing her flights. "Highland Mary" lived in hallowed memory; "Bonnie Jean," in tangible and warm presence; but even a married Poet, Burns says—and he should know—must have a mistress: and here was the repelled heart of a Poet ready to be caught at the rebound. At this time we find him writing Miss Chalmers—"My rhetoric seems quite to have lost its effect on the lovely half of mankind. I have seen the day!—but that is a tale of other years. In my conscience, I believe that my heart has been so often on fire that it is absolutely vitrified."—But the day was not yet wholly gone by. As the cold or haughty Charlotte Hamilton sunk below the horizon, that other sun of her sex, "charming Clarinda," arose.

Burns was at this time in wretched spirits. The recollection of Jean Armour must have been fraught with regret and remorse. He had been annoyed and worn-out by the dilatoriness or avarice of Creech; and he felt himself in a false position with the aristocratic world. He had all along understood this; but now he felt it in the wretched collapse that must ever follow the high excitement of every species of *lionizing*, even when the noble animal has the robust strength and ferocious pride of ROBERT BURNS. His soul at this time, in his own expressive language to Margaret Chalmers, "longed for a resting-place in her wanderings through the weary, thorny wilderness of this world! God knows," he says, "I am ill-fitted for the struggle."—There was no affectation here. He had, when a poor lad at Irvine, trying to dress flax for his daily bread, said the same thing to his "honoured" father. Then again he would rally, and tell Charlotte's friend, who he felt understood and valued him, "I glory in being a poet,—I want to be thought a wise man. I would fain be generous; and I desire to be rich. After all, I fear I am a lost subject. Some folks hae a hantle

* There is a series of Love-Letters by Burns, addressed to some anonymous E., about whom all his biographers puzzle themselves. It is singular that they do not perceive that these epistles are mere exercises in composition, or the commencement of a sort of serious novel in Letters.

o' fauts, but I am a ne'er-do-weel."
 "I am under the care of a surgeon, with a bruised limb extended on a cushion; and the tints of my mind vying with the livid horror preceding a midnight thunder-storm." "I have taken tooth and nail to the Bible. It is really a glorious book. I would give my best song to my worst enemy, I mean the making of it, to have you and Charlotte by me. You are angelic creatures, and could pour oil and wine into my wounded spirit."

But this might not be; and Clarinda was near at hand, to pour in the oil and wine, a most willing, and not ungente ministering spirit. Allan Cunningham was, however, mistaken in supposing that she stood by his couch, soothing him by her presence, or animating him by her wit: for Burns was, at this time, residing in the house of his friend, Mr. Cruickshank, of the High School; and there was a Mrs. Cruickshank, too; and though Clarinda volunteered to pay him a visit of condolence, he was under the cruel necessity of reminding her of "cursed etiquette." But it is more than time that we were arrived at that correspondence in which, as we have already said, vanity, the desire of making the acquaintance of a poet, or a Lion in high vogue, and a considerable spice of natural coquetry and love of admiration, seem to have been the originating motives with the lady; and with the lover, (?) gallantry, courtesy, a little leaven of vanity, sheer idleness, a troubled and distracted mind, and some of that pride of epistolary eloquence which distinguishes all his early letters of the ceremonial kind, and affords the only trace of affectation to be found in his voluminous writings. Among his affectations he never affected Platonics: he declared himself Anti-Platonic. He was no more capable of wilfully misleading any woman, than of hoodwinking the clear and manly understanding which God had given him.

Mr. M'Lehose says of the period of his grandmother's first intercourse with Burns—

The first edition of his poems, published in Edinburgh, had been eminently successful,—producing considerable fame, and an amount of funds which, compared with his previous circumstances, must have seemed riches. He had been also introduced to circles of talent and acquisitions, rank and fashion, which, in his original situation, he never could have hoped to see. But such unequal intercourse necessarily exposes the inferior to occasional caprice. Burns had some experience of this; and, as he always had a particular jealousy of people richer or higher than himself, he must have felt deeply mortified.

Again, with his ardent temperament, he could not but fall in love with some of the elegant young ladies he met with in these circles; and comparing their cultivated charms with those of his former loves, he seems to have felt a desire to possess one for a wife; but his inferior rank, unsettled circumstances, and, above all, his equivocal "certificate as a bachelor," presented an unsurmountable barrier. It is evident, that at this time he considered himself free of all legal and moral obligation to Jean Armour; regarding the burning of her marriage lines, and her acquiescence in their destruction, as releasing him from the responsibility of wedlock, though he felt "a miserable blank in his heart with the want of her."

Thus circumstanced, Burns made the acquaintance of Mrs. M'Lehose; and is it to be wondered at, that he found great delight in the society of a lady of her talents and great vivacity,—well-read and fond of poetry, ro-

mantic, and a "bit of an enthusiast," warm in her feelings and attachments,—who immediately and keenly sympathized with him; or, is it a matter of surprise, that he felt, and sometimes expressed hopes that were wild and visionary?

Mrs. M'Lehose was at this period a young married woman whose husband was abroad; but, owing to his unmerited bad treatment of her, a separation had taken place several years before. She was gifted with ardent affections, and feelings capable of the most devoted attachment,—in the prime of life,—not possessed of the "dear charities of brother, sister, parent:" for "I have none of these," she writes, "and belong to nobody." How deeply she felt the loneliness of her situation appears from what she writes in another letter:—"At this season, [New Year,] when others are joyous, I am the reverse. I have no near relations; and while others are with their friends, I sit alone, musing upon several of mine, with whom I used to be, now gone to the land of forgetfulness."

Thus as it were desolate, and feeling that "her heart, her fondest wishes, could not be placed on him who ought to have had them, but whose conduct had justly forfeited them,"—it was very natural, though not very prudent, that she had long "sought for a male friend . . . who could love me with tenderness—yet unmixed with selfishness; who could be my friend, companion, protector! and who would die sooner than injure me."

This friend she now found. "I sought, but I sought in vain. Heaven has, I hope, sent me this blessing in my Sylvander."

Though the friends of Mrs. M'Lehose's husband condemned his conduct, and had suffered severely from it themselves, yet they, in some degree, espoused his cause; and no doubt were ready to listen to any whisper of slander against her. Her temperament, naturally too sensitive, led her to be extremely timid and cautious.

Now, we see no evidence whatever of *timidity*, but of something more like the reverse; nor yet of *caution*, save what was required to avoid the consequences of conduct somewhat indiscreet. Mr. M'Lehose proceeds—

Mrs. M'Lehose was, in several respects, a ready mark for the ill-natured observations of the envious and censorious,—being a wit and a beauty, and having "an inveterate turn for social pleasure." When she indulged this turn, she admits that her vivacity often carried her too far. "If you saw me in a merry party, you would suppose me only an enthusiast in *fun*; but I now avoid such parties. My spirits are sunk for days after; and, what is worse, there are sometimes dull or malicious souls who censure me loudly for what their sluggish natures cannot comprehend. Were I possessed of an independent fortune, I would scorn their pitiful remarks; but everything in my situation renders prudence necessary."

When Burns visited Mrs. M'Lehose, she lived in a court at the back of General's Entry, Potter-row, a narrow street into which this entry forms a passage. A small circular stair leads to the different floors, on the first of which she lived. The rooms are small and low-roofed, with windows of less size than many modern panes of glass.

In the year 1787, the building of the New Town of Edinburgh was not far advanced, and the good people were not accustomed to wide, airy streets; nor did they generally occupy spacious rooms, with abundance of the light of heaven. They were content to live in alleys and courts, or, at best, in narrow streets; and were satisfied with small rooms, with diminutive windows, which did not afford a sufficiency of daylight. When people lived in such close neighbourhood, they had much better opportunities than are afforded in the present day of watching the movements of their neighbours; opportunities which, it has been wickedly asserted, they were not slow to improve. To this they may have been so far incited by the deficiency of daylight; the very obscurity, perhaps, lending a charm to prying curiosity.

In Clarinda's letter to Sylvander, of the 16th January, there is an amusing instance of her anxiety to avoid this disagreeable sort of observation:—"Either to-morrow or Friday I shall be happy to see you. * * * I hope you'll come a-foot, even though you take a chair home. A chair is so uncommon a thing in our neighbourhood, it is apt to raise speculation; but they are all asleep by ten." It is not to be doubted that a sedan chair would have caused much interesting speculation in an "entry;" and it was a lucky circumstance that the neighbours, some of whom, it is to be feared, were of the "coarser stuff of human nature," were such early-to-bed people.

When Mrs. M'Lehose sought for a friend, who could love her with tenderness unmingled with selfishness, and found this friend in Sylvander, she underrated the influence of love and the power of the charmer. It is easy to resist the beginning of passion; easy to turn aside the stream when it is small; but difficult to direct or stem the current when the stream has become a torrent. Thus Clarinda became so rapidly and so strongly attached to Sylvander, that she herself trembled for the consequences. Pleased with the genius of this extraordinary man, who had "her best wishes before they met," she did not sufficiently estimate the danger of so tender an intercourse.

But though there were many rocks on which their love was threatened with shipwreck, sometimes from the boldness of the pilot, sometimes from her own uncalculated alarm, it is apparent, that what she required in such a friend (and her requirements who shall condemn!) was satisfactorily fulfilled. "In you, and you alone, I have ever found my highest demands of kindness accomplished; nay, even my fondest wishes not gratified only, but anticipated." That Mrs. M'Lehose was innocent of all criminal thoughts and intentions, it is believed no candid mind can doubt, after reading the following series of letters. Her love was, indeed, a flame "where Innocence looked smiling on, and Honour stood by, a sacred guard." Yet it may be doubted whether any married woman should have permitted herself to continue in circumstances of such temptation; certain it is, that few women could have come out of such a trial untarnished. But she did come forth unblemished, and live to a good old age, respected and beloved by all who knew her. This could not have been the case if there had been any spot in her character for scandal to point the finger at. Her attachment she had early revealed to her clergyman, and even taken his advice about it. It was a subject of conversation with various friends, some of whom even "trembled for her peace." Such frankness bears the stamp of conscious innocence.

But the query with some will be, "Has Clarinda come forth untarnished?" There are many degrees of tarnishing. In the sense which Mr. M'Lehose seems to imply, the "ill-married lady" did, we think, come forth "untarnished;" and the severest verdict which can be passed is, "Not Proven." We must, however, while we say *Not Guilty*, confess that these *tête-à-tête* interviews which she herself sought with "Rab Moesgiel" were, as the Scotch say, "a mere tempting of Providence." She consulted her clergyman, who was the same Father Confessor to whom we have alluded above, and whom we will meet again in the course of the correspondence. We are too stanch Protestants to like such delicate consultations.

Allan Cunningham imagines, and many other persons have held the same opinion, that in these Letters, "in general, the raptures of Sylvander are artificial and his sensibility assumed. He puts himself into strange postures and picturesque positions, and feels imaginary pains to correspond." Mr. M'Lehose repudiates this view of a correspondence which Allan Cunningham had only partially seen; but we suspect that it is substantially

the right one. Mr. M'Lehose urges that the critics do not make sufficient allowance "for a man of the ardent temperament of Burns."

Burns had too much good taste to endure affected love-letters himself. In his own picturesque language he remarks:—"The whining cant of love, except in real passion and by a masterly hand, is to me as insufferable as the preaching cant of Father Smeaton, Whig minister at Kilmaurs." Now, though we have here the masterly hand, the real passion is long either doubtful or of the slightest character; one of the hundred flames which had at last "vitified" his heart. Mr. M'Lehose, however, contends that Sylvander took a deep interest in Clarinda from the first, and that

The feelings expressed by him were really felt, and not assumed: for no man can exhibit more earnestness and sincerity of purpose; and, indeed, he seems too soon to have hinted at hopes which were visionary. If Sylvander, at a later period, seriously entertained such hopes, it explains many of his strong expressions of attachment, otherwise bombastic. It must be admitted that several of his letters contain passages offensive from their boldness and presumption, which wounded the nice sensibility of Clarinda; but these were avowedly written after deep potations.

Now, as to "the nice sensibility" of Clarinda, and whether her ideas did not sometimes outrun the occasion, repelling, or seeming to repel advances that were never made, we leave the reader to judge for himself, and in mercy. Laying aside altogether the worthless and heartless husband in Jamaica, Mrs. M'Lehose owed much to herself and her children; and it is enough that there are passages in the letters addressed to her that ought to have offended her, had she not herself given the key to the strain in which they are composed. We are not pleading for Burns. His own brawny shoulders are perfectly able to bear the weight of all his transgressions; but we would remind the reader, that he was at this time suffering that necessity of a poet—the want of a mistress; and the most social and sympathetic of human natures was, besides, always in need of some congenial boom, and, if possible, a soft one, in which to deposit the outpourings of his Muse and his heart.

There must have been some actual flirtation, some inviting coquetry, at Miss Nimmo's tea-board, before, in his first note, he could write—

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

The next letter, written on the 8th December, and two days later than the above, contains the Poet's eloquent regrets for not being able to keep his appointment, in consequence of his bad accident, and concludes thus:—

I cannot bear the idea of leaving Edinburgh without seeing you. I know not how to account for it—I am strangely taken with some people, nor am I often mistaken. You are a stranger to me, but I am an odd

being. Some yet unnamed feelings—things not principles, but better than whims—carry me farther than boasted reason ever did a philosopher. Farewell! Every happiness be yours!

Mrs. M'Lehose, not yet merged in Clarinda, replied that same night in a long letter, her first,—of which this is the pith:—

Inured as I have been to disappointments, I never felt more, nay, nor half so severely, for one of the same nature! The cruel cause, too, augments my uneasiness. I trust you'll soon recover it. Meantime, if my sympathy, my friendship, can alleviate your pain, be assured you possess them. I am much flattered at being a favourite of yours. Miss Nimmo can tell you how earnestly I had long pressed her to make us acquainted. I had a presentiment that we should derive pleasure from the society of each other. To-night I had thought of fifty things to say to you: how unfortunate this prevention!

You shall not leave town without seeing me, if I should come along with good Miss Nimmo, and call for you. I am determined to see you; and am ready to exclaim with Yorick, "Tut! are we not all relations?" We are, indeed, *strangers* in one sense—but of near kin in many respects: those "nameless feelings" I perfectly comprehend, though the pen of a Locke could not define them.

Miss Nimmo was a favourite of mine from the first hour I met with her. There is a softness, a nameless something about her, that, were I a man, old as she is, I should have chosen her before most women I know. I fear, however, this liking is not *mutual*. I'll tell you why I think so, at meeting. She was in mere jest when she told you I was a poetess. I have often composed rhyme, (if not *reason*), but never one line of *poetry*. The distinction is obvious to every one of the least discernment. Your lines were truly poetical: give me all you can spare. . . . Read the enclosed, which I scrawled just after reading yours. Be sincere; and own that, whatever merit it has, it has not a line resembling poetry. Pardon any little freedoms I take with you: if they entertain a heavy hour, they have all the merit I intended. Will you let me know, now and then, how your leg is? If I were your *sister*, I would call and see you; but 'tis a censorious world this; and (in this sense) you and I are not of the world. Adieu. Keep up your heart: you will soon get well, and we shall meet. Farewell. God bless you.

How could a young poet do less than reply to this frank and affectionate epistle by a friendly cast of his calling. He wrote—

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

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

Now Burns had, at this time, many causes of trouble, that neither Clarinda nor the world wotted of; and the sentimental and romantic flirtation, unredeemed at this time by one particle of serious feeling on either side, served to beguile care and the tedium of confinement, and also to fill a paragraph in a letter to a friend; though Burns never, in any way, betrayed or compromised the imprudent Clarinda. She must have proclaimed the imaginary conquest, of which she naturally was not a little vain, in submitting delicate cases of conscience to her spiritual director, and some other of her male admirers. Burns had more discretion and honour. Her real name never once appears in his correspon-

dence; and but once he alludes to "Clarinda" in a letter to his young admirer, Robert Ainslie, who had begged to be introduced to her. To his pernicious early friend Mr. Richard Brown, he about this time writes:—"I have much to tell you of men and manners and their ways; perhaps a little of the other sex too. . . . Almighty love still reigns and revels in my bosom; and I am at this moment ready to hang myself for a young Edinburgh *widow*, who has wit and wisdom more murderously fatal than the assassinating stiletto of the Sicilian banditti, or the poisoned arrow of the African savage. . . . You may guess her wit by the verses she sent me the other day:" and he copies out for his friend, Clarinda's well-known and best verses, beginning "Talk not of Love." It is due to the lady to state, that the third strong stanza was added by the Poet; though he does not tell his correspondent this. This correspondent was, perhaps, the most fitting recipient of this kind of confidence in the whole circle of Burns' acquaintance. He was that friend of whom in his celebrated autobiographical letter to Dr. Moore, he says:—"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." There is some discrepancy in the dates of these letters; for that one, sending Mr. Richard Brown the verses, is dated the 30th December; and Clarinda's, in which they purport to have been enclosed to Burns, is not written till the 4th of January, when the Platonic affection was nearly a whole month old. Though the Bard was by profession and complexion bound to display a little rodomontade upon this occasion, the ideas of the lady had certainly outrun his presumption, when to his high-flown hyperbolic compliments, she replied in the plain style—

When I meet you, I must chide you for writing in your romantic style. Do you remember that she whom you address is a married woman? or, Jacob-like, would you wait seven years, and even then, perhaps, be disappointed, as he was? No; I know you better: you have too much of that impetuosity which generally accompanies noble minds. To be serious, most people would think, by your style, that you were writing to some vain, silly woman to make a fool of her, or worse. I have too much vanity to ascribe it to the former motive, and too much charity to harbour an idea of the latter; and viewing it as the effusion of a benevolent heart upon meeting one somewhat similar to itself, I have promised you my friendship: it will be your own fault if I ever withdraw it. Would to God I had it in my power to give you some solid proofs of it! Were I the Duchess of Gordon, you should be possessed of that independence which every generous mind pants after; but I fear she is "no Duchess at the heart." Obscure as I am (comparatively,) I enjoy all the necessities of life as fully as I desire, and wish for wealth only to procure the "luxury of doing good."

If my scrawls can amuse you in your confinement, you shall have them occasionally. I shall hear of you every day from my beloved Miss Nimmo. Do you know, the very first time I was in her house, most of our conversation was about a certain (lame) poet? I read her soul in her expressive countenance, and have been attached to her ever since.

Burns must now have begun better to understand the character of his correspondent. Of the above rebuke, he says—

Your last, my dear Madam, had the effect on me that

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

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

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

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

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

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

This "I have nothing else to do," we verily believe was the simple fact, and the cause to which we owe this letter and many others. His next (for Clarinda's reply to the above is imagined to be lost) informs her that her admirer had showed her verses to Dr. Gregory, with some *bagatelles* of his own, and of the Dr.'s admiration of them, at which she eagerly grasps; and sundry other matters which we leave to the reader's candour; as this passage:—

'Tis true I never saw you but once; but how much acquaintance did I form with you at that once! Do not think I flatter you, or have a design upon you, Clarinda: I have too much pride for the one, and too little cold contrivance for the other; but of all God's creatures I ever could approach in the beaten way of acquaintance, you struck me with the deepest, the strongest, the most permanent impression. I say the most permanent, because I know myself well, and how far I can promise either on my prepossessions or powers. Why are you unhappy?—and why are so many of our fellow-creatures, unworthy to belong to the same species with you, blest with all they can wish? You have a hand all-benevolent to give,—why were you denied the pleasure! You have a heart formed, gloriously formed, for all the most refined luxuries of love,—why was that heart ever wrung! O Clarinda! shall we not meet in a state, some yet unknown state of being, where the lavish hand of Plenty shall minister to the highest wish of Benevolence, and where the chill north-wind of Prudence shall never blow over the flowery fields of enjoyment! If we do not, man was made in vain.

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

The correspondence thus happily begun, did not flag on the part of Clarinda. "I shall grow vain," she says—

Your praises were enough,—but those of a Dr. Gregory superadded! Take care: many a "glorious" woman has been undone by having her head turned. "Know you!" I know you far better than you do me. Like yourself, I am a bit of an enthusiast. In religion and friendship quite a bigot—perhaps I could be so in love too; but everything dear to me in heaven and earth forbids! This is my fixed principle; and the person who would dare to endeavour to remove it I would hold as my chief enemy. Like you, I am incapable of dissimulation; nor am I, as you suppose, unhappy. I have been unfortunate; but guilt alone could make me unhappy. Possessed of fine children,—competence,—fame,—friends, kind and attentive,—what a monster of ingratitude should I be in the eye of Heaven were I to style myself unhappy! . . . Religion, the only refuge of the unfortunate, has been my balm in every woe. O! could I make her appear to you as she has done to me! Instead of ridiculing her tenets, you would fall down and worship her very semblance wherever you found it! . . .

I am confounded at your admiring my lines. I shall begin to question your taste,—but Dr. G.! When I am low-spirited (which I am at times) I shall think of this as a *restorative*.

P.S.—I entreat you not to mention our corresponding to one on earth. Though I've conscious innocence, my situation is a delicate one.

The next letter is still from Clarinda. A week had elapsed, and Burns had, perhaps, found "something else to do." She tells him:—

No wonder Dr. Gregory criticised my lines. I saw several defects in them myself; but had neither time nor patience (nor ability, perhaps,) to correct them. The three last verses were longer than the former; and in the conclusion, I saw a vile tautology which I could not get rid of. . . . I rejoice to hear of Dr. Gregory being your particular friend. Though unacquainted, I am no stranger to his character: where worth unites with abilities, it commands our love as well as admiration.

And next she lectures the Poet, and expounds her own theory of love and friendship, concluding—

An honest man *may* have a friendly prepossession for a woman whose soul would abhor the idea of an intrigue with her. These are my sentiments upon this subject: I hope they correspond with yours. 'Tis honest in you to wish me to see you "just as you are." I believe I have a tolerably just idea of your character. No wonder; for had I been a man, I should have been you. I am not vain enough to think myself equal in abilities; but I am formed with a liveliness of fancy, and a strength of passion little inferior. . . . Both of us are incapable of deceit, because we want coolness and command of our feelings. Art is what I never could attain to, even in situations where a little would have been prudent. Now and then, I am favoured with a salutary blast of "the north-wind of Prudence." . . . My heart was formed for love, and I desire to devote it to Him who is the source of love! Yes: we shall surely meet in an "unknown state of being," where there will be full scope for every kind, heartfelt affection—love without alloy, and without end. Your paragraph upon this made the tears flow down my face! I will not tell you the reflections which it raised in my mind; but I wished

that a heart susceptible of such a sentiment took more pains about its accomplishment.

Clarinda earnestly desired the conversion of Burns. She was greatly scandalized at some of his poems, *The Holy Fair*, we presume, or *The Ordination*, or *The Unco Gude*; and she afterwards tells him, that Clarinda would have "held him in her arms, until he had promised not to publish those terrible poems," or words to that effect, as the indictments say. He was much better employed in writing those satires, not only for the world, but for himself. Clarinda's correspondence now became semi-religious, and somewhat comic withal. She inquires—"Is Dr. Gregory pious? I have heard so. I wish I knew him." But Burns did not take the hint; he kept "the divine Clarinda," as she loves to term herself, vainly repeating his idle words, all to himself. There was as much sterling good sense and correct taste, as high genius, in the young rustic, who thus, for

"Pastime, and to show his wit,"

condescended to masquerade for a time in the character of a Sylvander. In the letter in which Clarinda enclosed her love-verses, she asks—

Do you think you could venture this length in a coach, without hurting yourself? I go out of town the beginning of the week, for a few days. I wish you could come to-morrow or Saturday. I long for a conversation with you, and lameness of body won't hinder that. 'Tis really curious—so much fun passing between two persons who saw one another only once? Say if you think you dare venture;—only let the coachman be "adorned with sobriety."

Burns, not Sylvander, here replies—

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

Good God! that one, who has so much worth in the sight of heaven, and is so amiable to her fellow-creatures, should be so unhappy! I can't venture out for cold. My limb is vastly better; but I have not any use of it without my crutches. Monday, for the first time, I dine in a neighbour's, next door. As soon as I can go so far, even in a coach, my first visit shall be to you.

Burns is not the first letter-writer who has occasionally compelled the same idea or sentiment, clothed in almost the same words, to do double and triple duty. Nor, if people, however clever, will be always scribbling letters about nothing, is there much harm in thus multiplying copies. The reader of Burns will meet with noble sentiments and fine images in this Correspondence, which he must have seen before; but also with others quite original, and worthy of their author.—But the sentimental correspondents were, at length, to meet; and while the meeting was impending, Sylvander, aware that "the keen sensibilities and strong imagination" of Clarinda must derive sublime pleasure from her warm devotional feelings, owned he could not yet give her all to Heaven—

I cannot, without a marked grudge, see Heaven totally engross so amiable, so charming a woman as my friend Clarinda; and should be very well pleased at a circumstance that would put it in the power of somebody, happy somebody! to divide her attention, with all the delicacy and tenderness of an earthly attachment.

To-morrow evening I intend taking a chair, and paying a visit at Park Place, to a much valued old friend. If I could be sure of finding you at home, (and I will send one of the chairmen to call,) I would spend from five to six o'clock with you, as I go past. I cannot do more at this time, as I have something on my hand that hurries

me much. I propose giving you the first call, my old friend the second, and Miss Nimmo as I return home. Do not break any engagement for me, as I will spend another evening with you at any rate before I leave town. Do not tell me that you are pleased when your friends inform you of your faults. I am ignorant what they are; but I am sure they must be such evanescent trifles, compared with your personal and mental accomplishments, that I would despise the ungenerous, narrow soul, who would notice any shadow of imperfections you may seem to have, any other way than in the most delicate agreeable raillery.

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

Now, this is pretty well, as a bit of poetical fiction; and it is rather wonderful that so clever a woman as Mrs. M'Lehose did not see through it. But vanity, the fondness of admiration, will blind the keenest sight; and love—But why profane the name which Burns has so often hallowed? That first meeting, that promised hour, from five to six, as Burns must have passed on his way to Mr. Crawford Tait's, he thus afterwards refers to; and if the reader cry, Fudge! we cannot severely blame him.

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

"——One well-spent hour,
In such a tender circumstance for friends,
Is better than an age of common time!"

THOMSON.

Then comes in that favourite and grand sentiment about Milton's Devil, which Burns has so often employed, though here rather abruptly and incongruously; and the letter to Dr. Moore is sent for the perusal of Clarinda; while Sylvander, upon the principle of a postilion flourishing his whip and making a famous splash as the journey draws to a close, exclaims—

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

"Out upon thee, hyperbolical fiend!"

Clarinda perused the autobiography of her glowing admirer with, we doubt not, very deep interest; and her tears broke out just at the proper place, namely, at the close, where the noble Glencairn's patronage rescues the unfortunate Bard from his evil destiny. Our own, we remember, while childhood and youth kept their melting moods, broke out much earlier; at the pathetic picture of that noblest peasant family "receiving the scoundrel factor's insolent threatening letters, which set them all in tears," and which first taught the proud boyish heart of the now glorified poet to throb with indignation. Clarinda was, as well she might be, proud of the confidence reposed in her; but she must also glorify herself a little, and refer to her own early love-passages, which she intended, "perhaps," to confide to Burns when they met. There was but one thing she could not get over—

One thing alone hurt me, though I regretted many—your avowal of being an enemy to Calvinism. I guessed it was so by some of your pieces; but the confirmation of it gave me a shock I could only have felt for one I was interested in. You will not wonder at this, when I inform you that I am a strict Calvinist, *one or two* dark tenets excepted, which I never meddle with. . . . My dear Sylvander, I flatter myself you have some opinion of Clarinda's understanding. Her belief in Calvinism is not (as you will be apt to suppose) the prejudice of education. I was bred by my father in the Arminian principles. My mother, who was an angel, died when I was in my tenth year. She was a Calvinist; was adored in her life; and died triumphing in the prospect of immortality. I was too young at that period to know the difference; but her pious precepts and example often recurred to my mind amidst the giddiness and adulation of Miss in her teens. 'Twas since I came to this town, five years ago, that I imbibed my present principles. They were those of a dear, valued friend, in whose judgment and integrity I had entire confidence. I listened often to him, with delight, upon the subject. My mind was docile and open to conviction. I resolved to investigate, with deep attention, that scheme of doctrine which had such happy effects upon him. Conviction of understanding, and peace of mind, were the happy consequences. Thus have I given you a true account of my faith. I trust my practice will ever correspond. Were I to narrate my past life as honestly as you have done, you would soon be convinced that neither of us could hope to be justified by our good works.

If you have time and inclination, I should wish to hear your chief objections to Calvinism.

Burns, we have said, never even affected Platonics. Clarinda feared there was no trace of "*friendship* for a female" in his narrative. "Now," she adds, "in the case of Clarinda, this is the only 'consummation devoutly to be wished.' " "You told me," she says,

You never had met with a woman who could love as ardently as yourself. I believe it; and would advise you never to tie yourself till you meet with such a one. Alas! you'll find many who *canna*, and some who *manna*; but to be joined to one of the former description would make you miserable. I think you had almost best resolve against wedlock: for unless a woman were qualified for the companion, the friend, and the mistress, she would not do for you. The last may gain Sylvander, but the others alone can keep him. Sleep, and want of room, prevent my explaining myself upon "infidelity in a husband," which made you stare at me. This, and other things, shall be matter for another letter, if you are not wishing this to be the last. If agreeable to you, I'll keep the narrative till we meet. Adieu! "Charming Clarinda" must e'en resign herself to the arms of Morpheus.

We need not say that Clarinda was well-informed about the passion of Burns for "Bonnie Jean;" though she must, by this time, have imagined herself the only object of his fondness. But whatever she felt for the mother, she took a warm interest in "the little cherub" at Mauchline, and made him "wee sarkies."

Clarinda's theory or creed as to the infidelity of a husband, which had, it seems, made Burns stare at her with those great, piercing, or glowing orbs of his, has no tincture of rigid Calvinism. It is thus expounded:—

I can conceive a man fond of his wife, yet, (Sylvander-like), hurried into a momentary deviation, while his heart remained faithful. If he concealed it, it could not hurt me; but if, unable to bear the anguish of self-reproach, he unbosomed it to me, I would not only forgive him, but comfort and speak kindly, and in secret only weep. Reconciliation, in such a case, would be exquisite beyond almost anything I can conceive! Do

you now understand me on this subject? I was uneasy till it was explained. . . . I have been puzzling my brain about the fair one you bid me "not guess at." I first thought it your Jean; but I don't know if she now possesses your "tenderest, faithfulest friendship." I can't understand that bonny lassie: her refusal, after such proofs of love, proves her to be either an angel or a dolt. I beg pardon; I know not all the circumstances, and am no judge therefore. I love you—

But we must pause. Whether our age is at heart more pure than that of our grandmothers', it is difficult to say; but certainly on some subjects it pays much greater external homage to decency.

The dray-horse and the cart-horse were frequent and favourite figures with Burns when, in defiance of his latent fund of good sense and true wisdom, it pleased him to ridicule the sober, commonplace virtues; and she who claimed to be his kindred spirit says:—

With you, I wish I had a little of the cart-horse in me. You and I have some horse properties; but more of the eagle, and too much of the turtle dove! Good night! . . . This day is so good that I'll make out my call to your Square. I am laughing to myself at announcing this for the third time. Were she who "*poisons your peace*," to intend you a Pisgah view, she could do no more than I have done on this trivial occasion. Keep a good heart, Sylvander; the eternity of your love-sufferings will be ended before six weeks. Such perjuries the "*Laughing gods* allow." But remember, there is no such toleration in friendship.

We hope that Sylvander *did* watch. Clarinda doubted it. At any rate he protested:—

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

"Where Speculation rooted near the sky."

I could almost have thrown myself over, for very vexation. Why didn't you look higher! It has spoilt my peace for this day. To be so near my charming Clarinda; to miss her look while it was searching for me. I am sure the soul is capable of disease; for mine has convulsed itself into an inflammatory fever.

Ah and alas! poor "darling Jean," far away there in Ayrshire, in sorrow and shame, abiding your hour! And is not Sylvander now more to be condemned than "Bonnie Jean's" unconscious rival; who neither cared, nor affected to care one straw for the worthless West India husband? There is something that is really amiable and womanly in parts of Clarinda's letters; though she does not often appear in so engaging a light as in this passage:—

If you saw me in a merry party, you would suppose me only an enthusiast in *fun*; but I now avoid such parties. My spirits are sunk for days after; and, what is worse, there are sometimes dull or malicious souls who censure me loudly for what their sluggish natures cannot comprehend. Were I possessed of an independent fortune, I would scorn their pitiful remarks; but everything in my situation renders prudence necessary.

I have slept little these two nights. My child was uneasy, and that kept me awake watching him! Sylvander, if I have merit in anything, 'tis in an unremitting attention to my two children; but it cannot be denominated merit, since 'tis as much inclination as duty. A prudent woman (as the world goes) told me she was surprised I loved them, "considering what a father they had." I replied with acrimony, I could not but love my children in any case; but my having given them the misfortune of such a father, endears them doubly to my heart.

In another letter, after the romantic Clarinda had related the ill-success of her ridiculous wanderings round St. James' Square in the hope of ob-

taining a passing glimpse of her admirer at his window,—“but not a glimpse could I obtain!”—she gravely tells him that Religion has taught her “patience and resignation to the ills of life,” though, she continues,

By nature I inherit as little of them as a certain harum-scarum friend of mine. In what respects has Clarinda “converted you”? Tell me. It were an arduous task indeed!

Your “ravings” last night, and your ambiguous remarks upon them, I cannot, perhaps ought not to comprehend. I am your friend, Sylvander: take care lest virtue demand even friendship as a sacrifice. You need not curse the tie of human laws; and since what is the happiness Clarinda would derive from being loosed?

After telling Sylvander rather plainly that she is not quite sure if she would accept of him though she were free, she repeats, “You see, Sylvander, you have no cause to regret my bondage.” She was anxious about certain bad companions with whom he associated. She wished him happily married, enraged as she seems to have been when he did “happily marry;” and moreover she clearly desired to make her own way in society. We have seen some of the hints about Dr. Gregory; here is another of the same kind:—

When you see Bishop Geddes, ask him if he remembers a lady at Mrs. Kemp’s, on a Sunday night, who listened to every word he uttered with the gaze of attention. I saw he observed me, and returned that glance of cordial warmth which assured me he was pleased with my delicate flattery. Did you ever read Sancho’s Letters? they would hit your taste. My next will be on my favourite theme—religion.

Farewell, Sylvander! Be wise, be prudent, and be happy.

CLARINDA.

Let your next be sent in the morning.

If you were well, I would ask you to meet me to-morrow, at twelve o’clock. I go down in the Leith Fly, with poor Willie: what a pleasant chat we might have! But I fancy ’tis impossible.

Burns could not, or would not walk to the Leith Stage, though it almost passed his door; but he hoped to see the “divine” Clarinda on foot very soon; and the first ominous visit was actually made on a Saturday night, of which we have this description from Clarinda:—

I will not deny it, Sylvander, last night was one of the most exquisite I ever experienced. Few such fall to the lot of mortals! Few, extremely few, are formed to relish such refined enjoyment. That it should be so, vindicates the wisdom of Heaven. But, though our enjoyment did not lead beyond the limits of virtue, yet to-day’s reflections have not been altogether unmixed with regret. The idea of the pain it would have given, were it known to a friend to whom I am bound by the sacred ties of gratitude, (no more,) the opinion Sylvander may have formed from my unreservedness; and, above all, some secret misgivings that Heaven may not approve, situated as I am—these procured me a sleepless night; and, though at church, I am not at all well.

Sylvander, you saw Clarinda last night, behind the scenes! Now, you’ll be convinced she has faults. If she knows herself, her intention is always good; but she is too often the victim of sensibility, and, hence, is seldom pleased with herself.

My God! Sylvander, why am I so anxious to make you embrace the Gospel? I dare not probe too deep for an answer—let your heart answer: in a word—Benevolence. . . . I fear your limb may be worse from staying so late. I have other fears too: guess them! Oh! my friend, I wish ardently to maintain your esteem; rather than forfeit one iota of it, I’d be content never to be wiser than now. Our last interview has raised you very high in mine, I have met with few, indeed, of your sex

who understood delicacy in such circumstances; yet ’tis that only which gives a relish to such delightful intercourse.

The correspondence grew warm and warmer, tender and more tender, and Burns waxed more hyperbolic. Yet his letters charmed Clarinda; and if she had, like Sylvander, been free, she owns, “I should bid him, if he had a friend that loved me, tell him to write as he does, and that would woo me.”—

Seriously, you are the first letter-writer I ever knew. I only wonder how you can be fashed with my scrawls. I impute it to partialities. Either to-morrow or Friday I shall be happy to see you. On Saturday, I am not sure of being alone, or at home. Say which you’ll come! Come to tea if you please; but eight will be an hour less liable to intrusions. I hope you’ll come *afoot*, even though you take a chair home. . . . You are a consummate flatterer; really my cheeks glow while I read your flights of Fancy. . . . If I grow affected or conceited, you are alone to blame. Ah, my friend! these are disgusting qualities! but I am not afraid. I know any merit I have perfectly.

There was no doubt whatever of Clarinda’s entire consciousness of her own merits. One of Burns’ letters at this period, after a high strain of flattery, or might it not have been the sincere feeling of momentary impulse, contains a grand poetical flight:—

May I see you on Wednesday evening, my dear angel! The next Wednesday again, will, I conjecture, be a hated day to us both. I tremble for censorious remarks, for your sake; but in extraordinary cases, may not usual and useful precaution be a little dispensed with? Three evenings, three swift-winged evenings, with pinions of down, are all the past—I dare not calculate the future. I shall call at Miss Nimmo to-morrow evening; ’twill be a farewell call.

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

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

The fruit of the second interview was the song

"Clarinda, mistress of my soul," and some remorse on the part of the lady, who, with an allegory, in which Love, Friendship, Reason, Hymen, Modesty, &c., &c., figure, lets us know how fairly alarmed she was for the moment at the perilous condition into which she had been betrayed by vain reliance on her own strength. She, indeed, becomes an object of interest and pity; but how does it all end?—

Sylvander, to drop my metaphor, I am neither well nor happy to-day: my heart reproaches me for last night. If you wish Clarinda to regain her peace, determine against everything but what the strictest delicacy warrants.

I do not blame you, but myself. I must not see you on Saturday, unless I find I can depend on myself acting otherwise. Delicacy, you know, it was which won me to you at once: take care you do not loosen the dearest, most sacred tie that unites us! Remember Clarinda's present and eternal happiness depends upon her adherence to Virtue. Happy Sylvander! that can be attached to Heaven and Clarinda together. Alas! I feel I cannot serve two masters. God pity me! Do not be displeased when I tell you I wish our parting was over. At a distance we shall retain the same heartfelt affection and interest in each other's concerns;—but absence will mellow and restrain those violent heart-agitations which, if continued much longer, would unhinge my very soul, and render me unfit for the duties of life. You and I are capable of that ardency of love, for which the wide creation cannot afford an adequate object. Let us seek to repose it in the bosom of our God. Part of some of your encomiums, I know I deserve; but you are far out when you enumerate "strength of mind" among them. I have not even an ordinary share of it—every passion does what it will with me; and all my life, I have been guided by the impulse of the moment—unsteady and weak! I thank you for the letter, though it sticket my prayer.

Friday Morning.—My servant (who is a good soul) will deliver you this. She is going down to Leith, and will return about two or three o'clock. I have ordered her to call then, in case you have ought to say to Clarinda to-day. I am better of that sickness at my heart I had yesterday; but there's a sting remains, which will not be removed till I am at peace with Heaven and myself. Another interview, spent as we ought, will help to procure this.

The correspondence now becomes so delicate, that we are constrained to skip, wanting power rightly to define its nature; and also to say, "methinks the *Poet* doth protest too much."—But he must have "kept his word," and "the line" he marked, with tolerable fidelity. He affected to believe that he was to observe the spirit of decorum's laws, if not the *letter*, in that other interview, to which he recurs in these fervent words:—

I could suffer the lash of misery eleven months in the year, were the twelfth to be composed of hours like yesternight. You are the soul of my enjoyment; all else is of the stuff of stocks and stones.

Clarinda feared "the line" had been a little infringed.

We must guard against going to the verge of danger. Ah! my friend, much need had we to "watch and pray!" May those benevolent spirits, whose office it is to save the fall of Virtue struggling on the brink of Vice, be ever present to protect and guide us in right paths.

I had an hour's conversation to-day with my worthy friend Mr. Kemp. You'll attribute, perhaps, to this, the above sentiments. 'Tis true, there's not one on earth has so much influence on me, except—Sylvander; partly it has forced me "to feel along the Mental Intelligence." However, I've broke the ice. I confessed I had conceived a tender impression of late—that it was mutual, and that I had wished to unbosom myself to him, (as I

always did,) particularly to ask if he thought I should, or not, mention it to my friend! I saw he felt for me, (for I was in tears;) but he bewailed that I had given my heart while in my present state of bondage; wished I had made it friendship only; in short, talked to me in the style of a tender parent, anxious for my happiness. He disapproves altogether of my saying a syllable of the matter to my friend,—says it could only make him uneasy; and that I am in no way bound to do it by any one tie. This has eased me of a load which has lain upon my mind ever since our intimacy. Sylvander, I wish you and Mr. Kemp were acquainted,—such worth and sensibility! If you had his piety and sobriety of manners, united to the shining abilities you possess, you'd be "a faultless monster which the world ne'er saw." He, too, has great talents. His imagination is rich—his feelings delicate—his discernment acute; yet there are shades in his, as in all characters; but these it would ill become Clarinda to point out. Alas! I know too many blots in my own.

On a previous evening, Burns had introduced his young friend Ainslie to her, who exultingly quotes herself as his "divine Clarinda."

Pray, what does Mr. Ainslie think of her? Was he not astonished to find her merely human! Three weeks ago, I suppose you would have made him walk into her presence unshod: but one must bury even divinities when they discover symptoms of mortality!—(Let these be interred in Sylvander's bosom.)

My dearest friend, there are two wishes uppermost in my heart: to see you think alike with Clarinda on religion, and settled in some creditable line of business. The warm interest I take in both these, is, perhaps, the best proof of the sincerity of my friendship, as well as earnest of its duration. As to the first, I devolve it ever into the hands of the Omniscient! May he raise up friends who will effectuate the other! While I breathe these fervent wishes, think not anything but pure disinterested regard prompts them. They are fond but chimerical ideas. They are never indulged but in the hour of tender endearment, when

—"Innocence

Look'd gaily smiling on; while rosy Pleasure
Hid young Desire amid her flowery wreath,
And pour'd her cup luxuriant, mantling high
The sparkling, Heavenly vintage—Love and Bliss."

'Tis past ten; and I please myself with thinking Sylvander will be about to retire and write to Clarinda. I fancy you'll find this stupid enough; but I can't be always bright: the sun will be sometimes under a cloud. Oh how I would indulge in all the luxury of innocent love! It is, I fear, too late to talk in this strain, after indulging you and myself so much; but would Sylvander shelter his Love in Friendship's allowed garb, Clarinda would be far happier.

To-morrow, didst thou say! The time is short now, is it not too frequent! do not sweetest dainties cloy soonest! Take your chance; come half-past eight. If anything particular occur to render it improper to-morrow, I'll send you word, and name another evening. Mr. — is to call to-night, I believe. He, too, trembles for my peace. Two such worthies to be interested about my foolish ladyship!

"Is not this," will some stern readers say, "a vain, foolish, and presumptuous woman, in whom even the warmth of devotion seems but another form of voluptuousness?" We are not prepared to enter into the subject as casuists; but we imagine that a multitude of sins might be forgiven, could the reader be once convinced, that her "foolish ladyship," who made such parade of feelings which almost any other woman would, in sorrow and humility, have buried deep in her own miserable bosom, had ever experienced for Burns the reality of devoted and passionate love. This next letter of Burns wears more the character of sincerity and so-

briety of mind, than some of those we have seen. It contains this detachable and fine apostrophe:—

Thou Almighty Author of peace, and goodness, and love ! do Thou give me the social heart that kindly tastes of every man's cup ! Is it a draught of joy !—warm and open my heart to share it with cordial, unenvying rejoicing ! Is it the bitter potion of sorrow !—melt my heart with sincerely sympathetic woe ! Above all, do Thou give me the manly mind, that resolutely exemplifies in life and manners those sentiments which I would wish to be thought to possess !

Clarinda modestly finds that there is a remarkable similarity of character between herself and Sylvander, in tastes, feelings, sentiments ; and after a few flights, which Burns, however, calls the finest poetry, she in confidence brings this delicate case under his consideration :—

Sylvander, I have things with different friends I can't tell to another, yet am not hurt ; but I told you of that particular friend : he was, for near four years, the one I confided in. He is very worthy, and answers your description in the "Epistle to J. S." exactly. When I had hardly a friend to care for me in Edinburgh, he befriended me. I saw, too soon, 'twas with him a warmer feeling : perhaps a little infection was the natural effect. I told you the circumstances which helped to eradicate the tender impression in me ; but I perceive (though he never tells me so)—I see it in every instance—his prepossession still remains. I esteem him as a faithful friend ; but I can never feel more for him. I fear he's not convinced of that. He sees no man with me half so often as himself ; and thinks I surely am at least partial to no other. I cannot bear to deceive one in so tender a point, and am hurt at his harbouring an attachment I never can return. I have thoughts of owning my intimacy with Sylvander ; but a thousand things forbid it. I should be tortured with Jealousy, that "green-eyed monster ;" and, besides, I fear 'twould wound his peace. 'Tis a delicate affair. I wish your judgment on it. O Sylvander, I cannot bear to give pain to any creature, far less to one who pays me the attention of a brother !

I never met with a man congenial, perfectly congenial to myself but *one*—ask no questions. Is Friday to be the last night ! I wish, Sylvander, you'd steal away ; I cannot bear farewell !

I am charmed with the Lines on Religion, and with you for relishing them. I only wish the world saw you as you appear in your letters to me. Why did you send forth to them the "Holy Fair," &c. ! Had Clarinda known you, she would have held you in her arms till she had your promise to suppress them. Do not publish the "Moor Hen." Do not, for your sake, and for mine. I wish you vastly to hear my valued friend, Mr. Kemp. Come to hear him on Sunday afternoon. 'Tis the first favour I have asked you : I expect you'll not refuse me.

Burns did not go to hear Mr. Kemp ; but he administered a good parting-dose of tender flattery to "divine Clarinda." There were, however, first more *tête-à-têtes*. Of one of them the lady says—

For many years have I sought for a male friend, endowed with sentiments like yours ; one who could love me with tenderness, yet unmixed with selfishness : who could be my friend, companion, protector, and who would die sooner than injure me. I sought—but I sought in vain ! Heaven has, I hope, sent me this blessing in my Sylvander ! Whatever weaknesses may cleave to Clarinda, her heart is not to blame : whatever it may have been by nature, it is unsullied by art. If she dare dispose of it—last night can leave you at no loss to guess the man.

She sent him more of her verses, all of which Mr. M'Lehose has printed in an Appendix to the Correspondence ; and again she expatiates on what she calls her "favourite topic," religion.

May I hope you'll read what I have urged on religion with attention, Sylvander ! when reason resumes her reign ! I've none of these future delusive hopes, which

you too vainly express as having towards Clarinda. Do not indulge them ; my wishes extend to your immortal welfare. Let your first care be to please God : for that which He delights in, must be happiness. I must conclude, or I'll relapse. I have not a grain of humour to-night in my composition ; so, lest "charming Clarinda" should make you yawn, she'll decently say "good night !" I laugh to myself at the recollection of your earnest asseverations as to your being anti-Platonic !

In this letter she notices the unfeeling usage which she had formerly received from Lord Dreg-horn, a cousin of her mother's, who had been raised to the bench. He is represented as an ill-natured, sensual man, of whom she justly says,

The man who enjoys more pleasure in the mercenary embrace of a courtesan, than in relieving the unfortunate, is a detestable character, whatever his bright talents may be.

I pity him ! Sylvander, all his fortune could not purchase half the luxury of Friday night !

Burns has either introduced the same ideas elsewhere, or perhaps the fragments of the surreptitious edition of his Letters to Clarinda, are floating about ; for this fine passage must, in its outline, be familiar to many of his admirers.

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

On reason build resolve—

That column of true majesty in man !

I have difficulties many to encounter," said I ; "but they are not absolutely insuperable : and where is firmness of mind shown but in exertion ! Mere declamation is bombast rant.

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

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

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

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

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

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

—"Innocence

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

Clarinda, when a poet and poetess of Nature's making—two of Nature's noblest productions !—when they drink together of the same cup of Love and Bliss, attempt not,

ye coarser stuff of human nature, profanely to measure enjoyment ye never can know.

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

O Thou, whose I am, and whose are all my ways ! Thou see'st me here, the hapless wreck of tides and tempests in my own bosom : do Thou direct to thyself that ardent love, for which I have so often sought a return, in vain, from my fellow-creatures ! If Thy goodness has yet such a gift in store for me, as an equal return of affection from her who, Thou knowest, is dearer to me than life, do Thou bless and hallow our band of love and friendship ; watch over us, in all our outgoings and incomings, for good ; and may the tie that unites our hearts be strong and indissoluble as the thread of man's immortal life !

The vainest of women, to whom these letters had been addressed, might be forgiven for now believing what she fondly wished—that she was beloved. Clarinda had no doubt or misgiving on the subject. She introduced a young friend of hers, Miss Mary Peacock, to the Poet, and the party had passed a very happy evening ; only

I tremble at the ardent manner Mary talks of Sylvander ! She knows where his affections lie, and is quite unconscious of the eagerness of her expressions. All night I could get no sleep for her admiration. I like her for it, and am proud of it ; but I know how much violent admiration is akin to love.

I go out to dinner, and mean to leave this, in case of one from you to-day. Miss Chalmers's letters are charming. Why did not such a woman secure your heart ?—O the caprice of human nature, to fix on impossibilities.

Her charming self, to wit. Burns fancied the fears expressed for Mary, in regard to himself, perfectly laughable ; but was not so sure on another score ; for " I suppose," he says, " my love, you and I showed her a scene which, perhaps, made her wish that she had a swain that could love like me." Which way could Mary have looked, then ? Some friend, or some of those gentlemen before whom Clarinda had, at this time, laid her case of conscience, seems to have remonstrated with her, and warned her against the exceeding impropriety of her conduct ; and in a letter, which is lost, she appealed in her distress to Sylvander, who positively refuses to cease to love, but is otherwise amenable to reason and propriety.

Name the terms on which you wish to see me, to correspond with me, and you have them. I must love, pine, mourn, and adore in secret : this you must not deny me. You will ever be to me

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

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

Farewell ! I'll be with you to-morrow evening ; and be at rest in your mind. I will be yours in the way you think most to your happiness.

Before going to bed, he resumed and argued the case, strongly protesting his own truth ; and there follows a tissue of eloquent sophistry, beginning,

I have read over your friend's haughty, dictatorial letter : you are only answerable to your God in such a matter. Who gave any fellow-creature of yours, (a fellow-creature incapable of being your judge, because not your

peer,) a right to catechise, scold, undervalue, abuse, and insult, wantonly and inhumanly to insult you thus ? I don't wish, not even wish to deceive you, Madam. The Searcher of hearts is my witness how dear you are to me ; but though it were possible you could be still dearer to me, I would not even kiss your hand, at the expense of your conscience. Away with declamation ! let us appeal to the bar of common sense. It is not mouthing everything sacred ; it is not vague ranting assertions ; it is not assuming, haughtily and insultingly assuming, the dictatorial language of a Roman Pontiff, that must dissolve a union like ours.

In a widowed, forlorn, lonely situation, with a bosom glowing with love and tenderness, yet so delicately situated that you cannot indulge these nobler feelings except you meet with a man who has a soul capable.

If Mrs. McLehose at this time lost, though ever so temporarily, the friendship and countenance of her cousin, Mr. Craig, through her indiscreet conduct, although Burns was not much to be blamed, because a fascinating woman had literally, in vulgar phrase, " thrown herself at his head," yet any man of even ordinary generosity, must have deeply lamented the mischief he had caused ; and how much more Burns, who now says—

Clarinda, matters are grown very serious with us : then seriously hear me, and hear me Heaven !

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

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

Expect me at eight ; and believe me to be ever, &c.

This was written on the 14th February ; and in a little month Sylvander was legally, if not ceremonially, the husband of Jean Armour, whose second pair of children were born on the 3d of March, and died in a few days afterwards. At the interview on the night of the 14th February, Clarinda must have poured forth her sorrows to Burns. Evil tongues were busy with her name,—and no wonder : for she had actually taken pains to invite censure of her connexion with him. Her vanity had been unable to confine to her own bosom the illustrious conquest of which she was naturally so proud.

Burns, now on the wing for Ayrshire, where the condition of Jean was become extreme, administered such consolation as was in his power. And thus closes the first Act of the Pastoral of *Sylvander* and *Clarinda*. The second Act, which we must reserve, becomes more serious for both personages ; because it displays, on the part of Burns, more of—

" The rueful conflict, the heart riven with vain endeavour ;" which, to his frail fellow-mortals, give a strong, nay, a tragic interest, to the incidents of his troubled life.