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AUTHOR OF "HISTORY OF SCOTTISH CHAP-BOOKS," "ARCHIE GASCOIGNE; A ROMANCE  
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# ROBERT BURNS.

BY

JOHN FRASER, A. M.

FORMERLY OF GLASGOW UNIVERSITY.

With clearer eyes I saw the worth  
Of life among the lowly,  
The Bible at his Cotter's hearth,  
Had made my own more holy.

But who his human heart has laid  
To Nature's bosom nearer?  
Who sweetened toil like him, or paid  
To love a tribute dearer?

*Whittier.*

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## PREFACE.

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159 DEARBORN ST.,

*Chicago, January 1st, 1887.*

DEAR FRIEND FRASER:

I feel unable to express the pleasure with which I received the first number of your brother's very popular lectures and do trust that they will meet with the success they so well merit. As a truly representative Scotch writer I think he stood alone in this great city, and as a Lecturer it will be difficult to get anyone to fill his place. Seeing the form the lectures are in, you might at your earliest convenience issue his one on "Robert Burns," as from the many talks we have had—during the time he was in charge of the literary department of my office—I know that Burns was his favorite poet. Even now his vivid description of the land of Burns rises up before me, as if painted on canvas, and I can almost see the small thatched cottage with its single door, two small windows, and its "but and ben" where the great poet was born; with the auld Kirk O'Alloway in its immediate vicinity; or standing on the poet's monument, view the beautiful scenery, more like an Italian than a Scotch scene, and see one of the reasons why Burns's songs are so pastoral in their character; or listening catch the low rumbling sound of the river as it passes through the "Auld and the New Brigs O'Ayr." Your brother seemed to treat Burns in his home life, as if he was personally known to him, and often have I listened as he told of the trials he shared along with his father, whom he simply adored, working away with a will, to make the barren soil yield a return for the labor expended. But it was when speaking of Burns as a poet that he seemed to forget himself, in his anxiety to give a proper estimate of the beauty of his verse; quoting song after song to illustrate his meaning, now with boyish gleesomeness singing a snatch of "When the Kye Comes Hame," crooning over quietly, "Ye Banks and Braes," all the while keeping time with his foot, or reciting the "Cottar's Saturday Night" with a pathetic and real intensity that once heard can never be forgotten. Suddenly rising and taking a cigar or toothpick,

he would walk back and forward quietly chuckling to himself all the while; and then coming close to where I sat, he would tell of his own college days and companionships, where Burns was being continually sung and parodied by medical or clerical students, who varied it by telling many unpublished stories about the poet. One song out of the many which he sung, comes vividly to my memory even now, the more so as I got it written down at the time, being struck with the strange rythmical beauty of the words, as he sang them in Latin,

“Virent arundines,” etc.

until I could almost wish I had been among those whose tramp, tramp—reverberating through the paved court and quadrangle of the Old Glasgow College—kept time to the singing of:

“Green grow the rashes, O!”

I feel certain that many who heard his lecture on Burns will be equally anxious to get a copy of it.

At the time of its delivery the press received it with very highly eulogistic criticisms, all of which he received in his usual quiet way; saying that of all the praise he got, that which he prized most of all was given at the close of this lecture, as he was talking to a small circle of friends. When a tall sailor-like man elbowed his way forward and holding out his hand, said “Man Johnie, but I am rale prood o’ ye, I wudna take a thoosand pound tae hae missed hearing ye, dae ye no ken me (mentioning his name) I’m frae Lochgilphead.” But I have written more than I intended, excuse my thus lingering and recalling to memory what to me will always be an oasis—in the midst of my busy life—fragrant with the memories of the educational talks which your brother and I had in my office. Again wishing you all success and placing my services at your command.

I remain yours truly,

JOHN B. JEFFERY.

NOTE BY THE PUBLISHERS.—We take the liberty of using Mr. John B. Jeffery’s letter, because it expresses in writing the desire of most of the subscribers, and many Scotch friends who know that this lecture was the means of securing the chair of English literature in the Chicago University.

Whilst in no way apologizing, we think it but fair to state that this lecture is the only one in the series that seems to have appeared, in part at least, in many of the Monthlies and Weeklies on both sides of the Atlantic, and from the notes in our possession, we are led to the belief that it was seldom delivered in exactly the same way, more especially as the subject was a very congenial one. This may account for the want of verve, which we fear, from the very eulogistic remarks of the press, and many who heard it, may be awaiting.—D. F. & Sons.



## LECTURE II.

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### ROBERT BURNS.

Through all his tuneful art, how strong  
The human feeling gushes  
The very moonlight of his song  
Is warm with smiles and blushes.

Give letter'd pomp to teeth of Time,  
So "Bonnie Doon" but tarry,  
Blot out the Epics stately rhyme,  
But spare his "Highland Mary."

*Whittier.*

In this lecture what I want to show you, is the picture of a man,—a man, who was also a great genius, with all a man's faults, a moral failure in some respects, but through all, in spite of all, perhaps the most splendid specimen literary history has ever shown, of sterling, independent, aggressive manhood. I shall not wait to tell you in detail of the sorrows and joys, the stormy and sunshiny incidents which wove themselves into the warp and woof of his life in an inseparable thread of darkness. The splendor of the gifts with which it is combined, makes this gloomy web only the more apparent; and through all the brightness and nobleness of the web it runs its darkling pattern, its intricate design, impairing the beauty, diminishing the greatness, yet adding a sorrowful human meaning, which touches while it humbles the spectator. Circumstances have set it before the world in such prominence that to many it seems the chief thing notable, the first memory attached to his name. Almost a century has passed, since in premature gloom and lurid splendor, the sun went down for him at noonday; and since then, the world has never ceased to dwell upon this warp in his nature and stain on his life.

It will be my aim to present to you both sides of the picture. If men of exquisitely sensitive and finely-strung poetic temperament, are

more easily touched to fine issues of sorrow or of wrong, than ordinary men, so, too, their moments of spiritual exaltation are more frequent—their raptures of joy more thrilling and intense. This was undoubtedly the case with Burns, and as I now attempt briefly to sketch him as he really was, all that I ask of you is a fair hearing, and a generous extension of sympathy to a brave, brilliant, generous and erring brother, whose noble nature was undoubtedly marred by some great failings, but who through them all shines forth as a splendid type of vigorous self-assertive, independent manhood. Although very little is heard of Burns's lineage yet it is a well authenticated fact, that he was a direct descendant of the noble House of Argyle, who suffered for the part they had taken in the rebellion of '42. The name Burness or Burns being derived from one of the estates confiscated from his forefathers.

Previous to the advent of Burns, on the 25th January, 1759, Scotland had been unrepresented in literature by any great poet, for nearly 300 years. Anonymous ballads there were, and fugitive snatches of song, such as perhaps no other nation can show in equal abundance and richness, but no sustained effort of individual genius. Scotland's long-protracted and desperate struggle for independence; the bitter rivalry of kings and nobles; her constant internal dissensions; the labor throes of the Reformation; the consequent discouragement of "profane" songs and art; the union of the two kingdoms of England and Scotland, which at first all but killed Scottish literature, by attracting the wealth, nobility, learning and genius of the country to London: all had conspired to discourage and repress native talent. So art slumbered, until Burns arose in his might to break the silence of three centuries, and elevate Scotland to her rightful place among the poet-mothers of the world.

The time of his advent, too, was peculiarly favorable to the development of bold and natural genius. In England, Cowper was vigorously heading the revolt inaugurated, some thirty years before, by Thomson, against the precise and frigid artificialism of Pope, and the so-called classical school, which had banished nature from the field, and, for the natural expression of feeling, had substituted a poetry of second intentions; a poetry marked by pointed antithesis, a labored and mechanical perfection of form, a monotonous intellectual coldness, and much heartless epigram. From Gray and Thompson, in part, Burns caught the infection, and, throwing to the winds conventional imagery and forms, boldly dared to be—not Pope, or Dryden, or Waller, but Robert Burns.

Nor were the circumstances of his upbringing unfavorable to the cultivation of the poetic spirit. Possessing a phenomenally sensitive nature; a soul that, Æolian-harp-like, was responsive to every breath of sentiment or gust of passion: finely sensitive to the sights and sounds of nature, the sorrows and failures and joys of life: he was brought up amid some of Scotland's loveliest scenery, and received an education superior to that enjoyed by many men in much higher ranks of life. To such as have been in the habit of regarding Burns as the illiterate possessor of a little Latin and less French, this may sound strange. But it is not French or Latin, however useful a knowledge of these may be, and undoubtly is, that furnishes the vital elements of a sound education; but a thorough grounding in those great principles which underly society, and regulate, or ought to regulate our relations with one another and with God; united to a conscientious and intelligent study of a few works of pre-eminent excellence, a practical knowledge of the ordinary business and conduct of life, the cultivation of noble and generous sympathies, and a fair knowledge of the English language and mastery of the art of composition. Now, Burns was fortunate in the possession of wise, upright, loving and God-fearing parents, who, like most Scotch parents, attached the utmost importance to a sound, liberal education, and spared neither money nor pains to insure such for their children. Certainly, Robert was never able to turn out Latin or Greek verses, as many an Eton stripling of that day could, who yet could hardly spell his own name in English; but he was indoctrinated from the cradle in the essential principles of Christianity, and *that* of a less rigid and hopeless kind than the hard and repulsive Calvinism which generally obtained in those days; and he was so grounded in the use of his native tongue that while yet a boy he could write with correctness, fluency and even elegance. He had, besides, the inestimable privilege of a library that was both *small* and select. Instead of being tempted by a whole world of Dime Novels, Sunday School literature, and Sea-Side trash, he was forced to confine himself to a handful of books such as the Bible, Mason's Collection of Prose and Verse, A Life of Hannibal, one of Wallace, the Spectator, Shakespeare, Pope, Richardson's "Pamela," Stackhouse's "History of the Bible," Locke's "Essay on the Human Understanding," a collection of English anthology, and a miscellaneous assortment of old Scottish songs and ballads. He was also trained to habits of rigid economy and self-denial, and was deeply impressed with the dignity of honest labor, and the importance of

moral worth. This certainly was not a college education, but to my thinking it was no unworthy substitute, and happy and great and prosperous would that nation be, all of whose children received just such an education as did Robert Burns. We should then see less of venal politicians; of great cities governed by the refuse of the slums, the gambling hells, the bucket shops and the saloons; of defaulting cashiers; of grasping and gigantic monopolists; of star-route swindlers; of the pride of purse, the greed of gain, the worship of wealth and the love of vulgar show, that are sapping the foundations of American society.

Further, the hard school of necessity in which the Poet was reared was no unkindly nurse for his poetic genius. A born-poet, if ever in this world poet *was* born; endowed in a supreme degree with the fine sensibilities which render the poet so alive to every influence of nature and feeling; dowered above most men with the "hate of hate, the scorn of scorn, and love of love," his youthful mind was fired, almost from the cradle, with the romantic songs and legends of his native land, and his mind filled with images of the beauty and freshness and glory of nature, as presented in the lovely scenery of his native Ayrshire. Had Burns not greatly suffered and gone wrong, had he himself not endured the sorrows and trials attendant upon a constant struggle to keep the wolf from the door, he would never have been able to so thoroughly identify himself with the suffering poor, as to voice their sentiments, aspirations, regrets and griefs, and become their acknowledged mouth piece and champion. The man who would touch the deepest springs of human feeling and action, must endure the difficulties and feel the fierce contention of every struggle he sings.

Despite its hardship and incessant toil, the frequent spells of hypochondria from which he suffered, Burns's life, until his father's death in 1784—when he himself was twenty-five years old—was a happy and hopeful one. Up to this time his heart was pure and fresh, his career unsullied by vice, and his ambitions wholesome and pure. The great comfort of his existence, the sweetener of his toil, was poetry. Following the plough, and crooning over to himself stray snatches of song, he was happy—now, it was some rustic beauty, whom he had met "coming through the rye"; anon it was a homeless mouse or wounded hare; or again it was a simple daisy—"wee modest, crimson-tipped flower"—but whatever it was he threw round it the generous glow of his own poetic nature, and invested it with fresh meaning and beauty. One loves to dwell on this bright spring time of the poet's



life, when his sole ambition was to earn an honest living and by and by, maybe, make his name known as a poet. When a child he cherished this secret aim, and even then glorious visions of a splendid immortality would flash at times across his mental horizon.

“E’en then a wish, I mind its power,  
 A wish that to my latest hour  
 Shall strongly heave my breast;  
 That I for puir auld Scotland’s sake,  
 Some useful plan or book could make,  
 Or sing a sang, at least.—  
 The rough bur-thistle spreading wide  
 Among the bearded bear,  
 I turn’d the weeder-clips aside,  
 And spared the symbol dear.”—

Spared the thistle! Write some song! blended patriotism and poetry—significant of a future that was to give to the world a “Scots wha hae,” and a “Mary in Heaven.” And as he continued to plough and sing, the stream of song including sketches of life and character which have lit up all Scotland; soft friendly outbursts of humor, and genial poetic laughter as sweet as silver bells; and mingled with these, such tender rural philosophies, such pathetic thoughtfulness, pity, and charity as go direct to the heart. It was his very climax of life. Every influence around him entered into his soul. Its doors stood open day and night ready to receive everything that was weak and wanted succor, and ready to be moved by everything that was lovely and noble. In all the world there was not a created thing which he shut out from his sympathy: from the “cowering beastie” in the fields, to auld Nickie-ben in “yon lowin’ heugh”—he felt for all. He is like a God in his tender thought, in his yearning for all their welfare.

And so his life continues to broaden and deepen, and as he follows the plough he scatters far and wide rich seeds of poetry and thought, which in after years will gladden and rejoice the hearts of millions. And thus the young ploughman sweeps on, playing upon his readers’ hearts as upon a magical instrument, now rolling deep in thunderous swells of feeling, now breathing a sweetness akin to tears. It is impossible to follow him through all those manifold notes, through this flood of harmony, at once exciting and soothing, without the warmest sympathy. We know these poems half by heart. Wet, some of them, with tears, and some also, red and warm with the heart’s blood of the great nature that rushed to precipitate itself into every song he

wrote,—songs that thus palpitate and quiver and throb as if they were in very deed the great heart itself, whose passionate yearnings they so daringly express. We change, as the poet bids us, and are grave and gay, and laugh and weep like so many fools, without pause or intermission, while we turn from page to page. Where did he get this heavenly gift? But anyhow, he exercised it while ploughing and reaping, and leading coals along the country roads, and draining the clayey barren fields.

From 1784, when his father died, the clouds rapidly deepened around him, until two years later his circumstances grew so desperate that he packed up and was on the eve of sailing for Jamaica. He had even taken out his passage, when an event occurred that changed the whole current of his life. This was the publication of a little collection of his Poems, which was received with an enthusiasm that lifted their author at one bound into the foremost ranks of fame, and held out tempting visions of future glory and profit. Then it was, in 1786, that in the flush of a first triumph Burns visited Edinburgh, to be wine and dined and feted and stared at in vague wonder and admiration by its fine lords and ladies, its exclusive maccaroni of the Parliament House and intellectual prigs generally, and finally, when they had satisfied their curiosity, and exhausted as much as they could that brilliant, young life, to be coldly dropped, or thrown aside like a squeezed orange.

To my mind, much of the tragedy of poor Burns's life is due to the manner in which he was alternately petted and 'cut' by the upper classes. Even in Mauchline the condescending friendship of the local 'writer' proved the reverse of beneficial, and by fanning Burns's pride, and contempt of social distinctions in the presence of genius, fostered his growing discontent and aggressive arrogance and independence.

He was nobly qualified, nobly trained for his true office, which lay among that class broadly and naturally entitled "the common people,"—the same who crowded the hillsides and clustered about the shores of the Lake in Galilee, listening—when their betters did not care to listen.

Burns was their born exponent in his day, their minstrel, their prophet; but the moment his head appeared above the level, and those frank fervid eyes, aglow with the poet's passion of surprised delight in the newness and loveliness of all he saw, the world, that is to say, the Edinburgh world, beheld, stared, wondered, and asked itself what to do? This strange apparition was like an unexpected visitor at the door. Of course he had to be admitted somehow. The conventional super-

stition which is just strong enough to keep common minds in awe, and extort those ceremonial observances of respect to genius in which superstition finds refuge—made it inevitable that when once the man became visible, he should be made to mount up higher, at least for the moment, and to sit down at the master's table. And the young man went up with his glowing eyes, expecting to find everything there that imagination paints of noble and graceful and refined—and found a flutter of small-talk, the gossip of a clique, the cleverness of local malice, instead of that feast of reason and flow of soul which fancy had looked for.

Mightily pleased, no doubt, were the patrons with this celestial slave they had gotten, this Samson whom they poked in his big ribs, and made to stretch out his muscles for their admiration—till the moment came when they had enough of him, and required no more. This natural inevitable process ruined Burns's life, and broke his heart; and it seemed for one terrible moment as if it might ruin his work too. But happily genius has better guards than those that fall to the lot of mere humanity, and the poet broke his bondage; the poet—but not the man.

A second edition of his poems was issued in 1787, and altogether Burns realized over £600 from their sale, one-third of which he gave to his brother Gilbert to assist him in his farming. Wearied of the brilliant though unsatisfactory hospitalities of the Scotch metropolis, which he had bewildered and dazzled by his brilliant wit, and mingled independence and modesty of demeanor, Burns left Edinburgh for Mossgiel in June 1787, only to return to the metropolis in the winter of the same year to settle up accounts with his publishers. With part of the proceeds he stocked and entered upon a small and beautifully situated, but sterile farm, called Ellisland, on the banks of the Nith, six miles from Dumfries. Here, with his wife and family he settled down, but not for long—the iron had already entered his soul. He had tasted of the perilous cup of enchantment proffered him in the intellectual salons of Edinburgh, had felt the keen delight of crossing his sword with intellectual giants and wits—had experienced the feverish transports of popular applause, and the excitement of fashionable life; and the incessant, commonplace toil and hum-drum monotony of a farmer's existence became insupportable. He neglected his farm, a bad one even in the best of hands, and finally was forced to leave it. He was appointed a gauger—to him, surely one of the most uncongenial positions possible. His new duties threw him more and more into

company which he should have shunned. Wherever he went every door was open, and the wine-glass liberally forced into his hands. His splendid wit and conversational powers, his brilliant reputation, and the popularity of his songs, made him only too welcome in hall and hut, and he drank often and deep. At the same time it is but fair to add that he very rarely got drunk, and not one of his many Dumfries acquaintances could say they had ever seen him intoxicated.

The race did not last long. In 1791 Burns gave up his farm at Ellisland, and removed into a small house at Dumfries. There he lived five years—and died. Through all this time he was, to use a homely phrase, burning the candle at both ends. He rode fast and far, and attended diligently to all the duties of his vocation. He poured fourth floods of song—songs full of passion and fervor—and which were not mere creations of the brain, but commemorated an amount of agreeable intercourse with his fellow-creatures which must have occupied no small portion of his time. He wrote numerous letters; he entered warmly, sometimes too warmly, into politics; he often spent half the night after this active employment of the day in merry companies, of which he was the inspiration, and where his talk was more fascinating than the wine—which flowed freely enough all the same. And into all these multifarious occupations he rushed with the impetuosity and unity of his nature, doing nothing by halves. He threw himself into Thomson's book of songs with zeal as great as if it had been the only work he had in hand; and withal, neither pleasure nor poetry prevented him from doing his work as an exciseman with the most punctilious exactitude. And Thomson accepted the songs, and was easily, very easily convinced that the author wanted no remuneration; and all the gentlemen who had known him, and did know him, and to some of whom he had even told his hopes and wishes, stood by, not even helping him on to be a supervisor, the most modest bit of promotion.

Meanwhile he did his humble work with less and less hope, and tried his best to get such good as was possible out of the dregs of his broken life. Much gentle and kind domestic virtue lingered about him to the end, notwithstanding all his vagaries. He would help his boys to learn their lessons, and read poetry with them, directing their childish taste; and for years there might be seen of an afternoon by any chance passer-by, in a little back street in Dumfries, through the ever-open door, one of the greatest of British poets, sitting reading, with half-a-dozen noisy children about, and their mother busy with a house-



wife's ordinary labor. This, I say, was visible to everybody who chanced to pass that way; and the days ran on quietly, and the world grew used to the sight, and it never seems to have occurred to any one, how many blockheads had comfortable libraries to maunder in, while this man—sole of his race in Scotland, and almost in the kingdom, for Wordsworth and Coleridge were still little more than boys—had neither quiet nor retirement possible. With an inconceivable passive quiet the good people went and came, and took it as the course of nature. A little later they were proud of having seen it; in the meantime it moved them not an inch. Neither would it now, were it all done over again.

There is one pathetic scene still, which appears to us out of the mists before death and peace came to end all. The story is told by a young country gentleman, who rode into Dumfries on a fine summer evening, to attend a ball, and saw Burns walking by himself down the side of the street, while various county people, drawn together by the evening's entertainment, were shopping or walking on the other.

"The horseman dismounted and joined Burns, who, on his proposing to him to cross the street, said, 'Nay, nay, my young friend, that's all over now;' and quoted, after a pause, some verses of Lady Grizel Baillie's pathetic ballad:—

" ' His bonnet stood ance fu' fair on his broo,  
His auld ane looked better than mony ane's new,  
But now he lets't wear any way it will hing,  
And casts himsel dowie upon the corn bing.

Oh were we young, as we ance hae been,  
We suld have been galloping down on yon green.  
And linking it ower the lily-white lea,  
*And werena my heart licht I would dee.' "*

It seems impossible to conceive that such a story could have been invented. To show that his forlorn heart was still "licht," God help him! Burns took the young man home and made him merry. What words these are! and with what unspeakable meaning they must have fallen from the poet's lips. Sad courage, endurance, gaiety, and profound untellable despair—not any great outburst, but an almost tranquil ordinary state of mind. "*Werena my heart licht I would dee*"—it is the sentiment of all his concluding years.

And thus he died—thirty-seven years old—worn out. His old terror of a jail came over him again like a spectre at the end, but he died owing no man anything, stern in his independence to the last. Yes,

this worthless, dissolute, reckless Bohemian—this profligate and spendthrift, who had to support a large family and his vices on less than \$400 a year,—died owing no man anything.

He died cheerfully and manfully like a Christian; though with his heart rent asunder by fears for the helpless children whom he was leaving behind him. And the moment he was dead his friends came and buried him; and red-coated splendors lined the streets, and a certain noble officer who would not in his lifetime permit the gauger to be introduced to him, played mourner to the dead poet. Strange satire, enough to tempt devils to laughter, but men to very different feelings. And while there was scarce a meal left in the penniless house, the bells tolled and the shops were closed, and a great procession swept through the streets, and volleys were fired over the grave of him who had been carried out of that home of poverty. What a change all in a moment!—because he was dead, and neglect or honor, help or desertion, could affect him nevermore.

And then, crowning mockery, they removed the humble but loving tribute of affection which his wife had placed over his grave, and erected in its stead a costily and imposing mausoleum. Verily, he had asked for bread, and they gave him a stone. Nay, not content with this, the very house in which he was born, in a sort of spirit of devilish mockery and as an everlasting reminder of poor Burns's failings, was turned into a tavern for the sale of whiskey and rum.

Burns's stormily splendid life is faithfully reflected in his verse. Both are marked by passionate intensity and an earnest spirit of truest humanity. Burns was in all things intensely human, and at the same time, if you understand me, intensely divine. A passionate sympathy with nature and his fellowmen, throbs and leaps through every line. He never does anything by halves. His grief shakes the soul to pieces; his laughs make the empyrean ring. He gives himself to the feeling of the hour with an all-absorbing abandon that drained his vital energies, and induced premature exhaustion. He compressed the emotions of an ordinary lifetime into a day; years of commonplace emotion he lived in an hour. Did he love? He dowered the object of his passions with all the splendor of heaven and earth, clothed her in the beauty of a thousand stars, and compelled the universe to pay tribute to her loveliness? Did he hate or scorn? How withering the retort—how annihilating the sarcasm! Did he assume a milder aspect and attune his lyre to holier strains? What can surpass the ineffable serenity and beauty and calm that turns a "Cottar's Saturday Night"

into a very heaven below, all the more serene and beautiful when contrasted with the usually fiery and turbulent passion of his genius. His range was perhaps not wide, but oh! how powerful. He held at command the spring of tears and laughter,—now dissolving the soul in grief, as he murmurs a hymn of praise and regret to his “Mary In Heaven;” now shaking the world with inextinguishable laughter with his “Dr. Hornbrook” or “Jolly Beggars;” anon, thrilling them with patriotic fire, and creating heroes out of clod-poles with a “Scots wha hae;” or causing their knees to tremble and their hearts to sink within them, with the horrors and diablerie of “Tam O’ Shanter.”

But it is when he sings of Love and Liberty that the notes of Burns ring loudest and sweetest and clearest. From boyhood his heart was most responsive to the claims of Beauty and of Country. His lines to “Nancy” furnished a motto for Byron, and were in Scott’s judgment, worth a hundred romances.

“Ae fond kiss, and then we sever;  
Ae farewell, alas, for ever!  
Had we never loved sae kindly,  
Had we never loved sae blindly,  
Never met, or never parted,  
We had ne’er been broken-hearted.”

Or take, in a different and softer strain, the world-familiar lines on “Afton Water”:

Flow gently, sweet Afton, among thy green braes,  
Flow gently, I’ll sing thee a song in thy praise;  
My Mary’s asleep by thy murmuring stream,  
Flow gently, sweet Afton, disturb not her dream.

Thou stock-dove whose echo resounds thro’ the glen,  
Ye wild whistling blackbirds in yon thorny den,  
Thou green-crested lapwing, thy screaming forbear,  
I charge you disturb not my slumbering fair.

How lofty, sweet Afton, thy neighboring hills,  
Far mark’d with the courses of clear, winding rills,  
There daily I wander as noon rises high,  
My flocks and my Mary’s sweet cot in my eye.

How pleasant thy banks and green valleys below,  
Where wild in the woodlands the primroses blow;  
There oft as mild ev’ning weeps over the lea,  
The sweet-scented birk shades my Mary and me.

Thy crystal stream, Afton, how lovely it glides,  
 And winds by the cot where my Mary resides;  
 How wanton thy waters her snowy feet lave,  
 As gathering sweet flow'rets she stems thy clear wave.

Flow, gently, sweet Afton, among thy green braes,  
 Flow gently, sweet river, the theme of my lays;  
 My Mary's asleep by thy murmuring stream,  
 Flow gently, sweet Afton, disturb not her dream.

This is simply perfect,—so perfect in its rounded peacefulness and purity that it seems almost sacrilege to read it aloud. It is one of those poems we like to croon over to ourselves, as if fearful that the invasion of even the gentlest sound would disturb its perfect repose.

But more moving still, because touching deeper springs of feeling—the deepest of which the suffering human heart is capable—is the equally well-known song “The Banks O’Doon;” in which the old, old contrast—old as time itself—is drawn by the sorrow-stricken soul, between the awful, changeless, terrible impassivity of nature, and the ever varying tragedies of the human heart. Take the first verse and the last,—

Ye banks and braes o’ bonnie Doon,  
 How can ye bloom sae fresh and fair!  
 How can ye chant, ye little birds,  
 An’ I sae weary, fu’ o’ care!

Wi’ lightsome heart I pu’d a rose,  
 Fu’ sweet upon its thorny tree;  
 And my fause lover stole my rose,  
 But ah! he left the thorn wi’ me.

Surely never has the despair of a broken-hearted and forsaken woman, who had loved not wisely but too well, been more feelingly expressed than in these last lines, in which we seem to catch the last despairing wail of the breaking heart:

“And my fause lover stole my rose,  
 But ah! he left the thorn wi’ me.

But Burns’s love songs are not all of this melancholy cast. Many of them, indeed most of them, are joyous and clear as the lilt of the skylark; and, merely to read them, is to renew one’s youth, and feel the blood tingle as in the days “when the bloom was on the rye.” Ah, me, what times were these we used to have, when we made the welkin ring with:



"Green grow the rashes, O,  
 Green grow the rashes, O;  
 The sweetest hours that e'er I spent,  
 Were spent amang the lasses, O."

And were they not the sweetest hours? To me, and I trust to you, they were,—aye and the best; and to many a way-worn and sorrow-beaten man the influence of these hours has continued throughout the years—aye, even to the gates of death—to soften the heart, and sweeten and ennoble life. There is not only true poetry but sound philosophy in the laughter-catching verse:

"There's nought but care on ev'ry han',  
 In ev'ry hour that passes, O;  
 What signifies the life o' man,  
 An' twere na for the lasses, O."

Little wonder that the poet,—turning his back for a brief moment on the vexations of an exciseman's life, the frown of fortune and the coldness of the great,—cries out in rapture.

"But gie *me* a canny hour at e'en,  
 My arms about my dearie, O;  
 An' warly cares, an' warly men,  
 May a' gae tapsalteerie, O."

And then comes in again the soul-inspiring chorus:

Green grow the rashes, O;  
 Green grow the rashes, O;  
 The sweetest hours that e'er I spent,  
 Were spent among the lasses, O!"

Akin in spirit, to these joyous love-lilts are Burns's Bacchanalian ditties. I am not now talking of their ethics. Poets of all ages and nations have sung in praise of Love and Wine, and in mentioning these of Burns I wish to regard them simply as works of art. As such they are unsurpassed in any language. I look upon "The Happy Trio," as the finest jovial song in literature.

"O, Willie brew'd a peck o' maut,  
 And Rob and Allan cam' to see;  
 Three blither hearts, that lee-lang night,  
 Ye wad na find in Christendie.

CHORUS.—We are na fou, we're na that fou,  
 But just a drappie in our e'e;  
 The cock may crawl, the day may daw,  
 And aye we'll taste the barley bree.

And:

"It is the moon, I ken her horn,  
That's blinkin in the lift sae hie;  
She shines sae bright to wyle us hame,  
But, by my troth, she'll wait a wee!

Scarcely less vigorous is "John Barleycorn," while companion love-songs to both are furnished in "Rigs o' Barley" and "Comin' thro' the Rye."

In the same class we may reckon that from the "Jolly Beggars," the chorus of which runs:

"A fig for those by law protected!  
Liberty's a glorious feast!  
Courts for cowards were erected,  
Churches built to please the priest."

This is the very apotheosis of blackguardism; the veritable war-cry Ode of ideal Bohemianism. The second verse which follows is sublime in its lawless audacity and reckless abandon.

"What is title? what is treasure?  
What is reputation's care?  
If we lead a life of pleasure,  
'Tis no matter how or where!  
With the ready trick and fable,  
Round we wander all the day;  
And at night, in barn or stable,  
Hug our doxies on the hay."  
\* \* \*

Then, with a finger-snap at all the proprieties:

"Life is all a variorum,  
We regard not how it goes;  
Let them cant about decorum  
Who have characters to lose."

Turn we now from these lawless strains to songs more fitted for ears polite, and while we are in a lively mood we may as well dismiss the epigrams with a passing remark. They are the poorest of all Burns's efforts, being coarse alike in execution and sentiment, and wanting in point. Among the best are perhaps these two:

#### THE BOOK-WORMS.

"Through and through the inspired leaves,  
Ye maggots, make your windings;  
But, oh! respect his Lordship's taste,  
And spare his golden bindings."

## THE PARVENUE.

[Written in reply to the boastings of an ignorant cox-comb, who was boring the company with an account of the many great people he had been visiting.]

"No more of your titled acquaintances boast,  
And in what lordly circles you've been;  
An insect is still but an insect at most,  
Tho' it crawl on the head of a queen."

Passing from his amorous and social songs, we come to the still higher and nobler flights, in which his passionate love of Independence and Freedom, and his strenuous belief in the dignity of moral worth, so magnificently assert themselves. Only a Scotchman can fully enter into the patriotic fervor of "Scots wha hae," which sweeps across the soul like a tornado and hurries it into the most impassioned spheres of patriotic enthusiasm, but "A Man's a Man for a' That," appeals to a broader humanity, and will find a ready and sympathetic response in the hearts of men of all nationalities and creeds.

Again, is not a bugle blast like "A man's a man for a' that" worth a library of the sensuous, affected, erotic fustian that passes for poetry now-a-days? How puny and small does even Tennyson's last "national song" sound, beside the soul-thrilling trumpet-peal of "Scots wha hae!"

To have written two such songs were immortality enough for any man. Burns has written many.

I would willingly dwell upon many other of his poems, such as, "McPherson's Farewell," so Homeric in its defiant strength, "John Anderson," most touching of connubial lyrics, and though only two verses, superior to Spenser's "Epithalamion," that magnificent bridal ode; "My Bonny Mary," "The Mouse," "The Daisy," and such sarcastic or humorous pieces as "Holy Willie's Prayer," "Duncan Gray," and above all, as being Burns's highest efforts, "The Jolly Beggars" and "Tam O'Shanter," but time will not permit, and at least the last-named is too familiar to call for criticism. And now, it only remains to add a word or two as to Burns's influence upon his age and literature.

In the first place, to Burns primarily, and after him to Scott, belongs the honor of having restored Scotland to her rightful place in history and letters. As his poems grew and developed into full and rounded maturity, the veil of the unknown was lifted, and all Lowland Scotland, sweet and cheery, came to light, as when the sun rises over an unseen land? Until the advent of Burns and Scott, Scot-

land was comparatively speaking, a literary and national nonentity. She had dropped from her place among the great producers of romance and song. Her lips were silent; no poet had risen to take up and don the singing robes of Dunbar, the Makar. The land of James I., Henryson, Douglas, Lyndsay, and Buchanan had fallen into disrepute; a thing to be sneered and jested at; breeder of a close-fisted, large-boned, throat-cutting, sheep-stealing, bare-legged, barbarous people, who lived on oatmeal and whisky, in bleak, barren and forbidding highland fastnesses, and ran about nearly naked. To sense of humor, they were utterly lost. To get a joke into their head required a surgical operation—the vigorous application of a cork-screw. Even Smollett, a Scotchman, dared hardly say a word in their favor, and that crossgrained, large-hearted old bear, Dr. Johnson, defined oats as “an article of food for men—in Scotland; for horses—in England.” This was the best that was said for them on the other side of the Tweed. The extraordinary revolution of sentiment since is due entirely to the two poets whose mission in very different ways was to make their country known. Burns was the first, and in some points he was very much the greater. His revelation was deeper, stronger, more original than that of the other. It reached lower down, revealing almost more than one nationality in the warm and tender light by which it made Scotland visible—for he made the poor visible at the same time, the common people, the universal basis of society. Hard must that man’s heart have been, and opaque his intellect, who, after reading the “Cottar’s Saturday Night,” could have looked with unchanged eyes upon a cottage anywhere. Scotland was the first object of the revelation—but after all the world.

“At length his lonely cot appears in view,  
 Beneath the shelter of an aged tree.  
 The expectant *wee things*, toddlin’ stacher through  
 To meet their dad, wi’ flichterin’ noise an’ glee.  
 His wee bit ingle, blinkin’ bonnily,  
 His clean hearthstane, his thriftie *wifie’s* smile,  
 The lisping infant prattling on his knee,  
 Does a’ his weary carking cares beguile,  
 An’ makes him quite forget his labour an’ his toil.

“Belyve, the elder bairns came drapping in,  
 At service out, amang the farmers roun’;  
 Some ca’ the the pleugh, some herd, some tentie rin  
 A cannie errand to a neebor town:



Their eldest hope, their *Jenny*, woman grown,  
 In youthfu' bloom, love sparkling in her e'e,  
 Comes hame, perhaps, to show a braw new gown,  
 Or deposit her sair-won penny-fee.  
 To help her parents dear, if they in hardship be,

"Wi' joy unfeigned, brothers and sisters meet,  
 An' each for other's weelfare kindly spiers;  
 The social hours, swift-winged, unnoticed, fleet;  
 Each tells the uncos that he sees or hears;  
 The parents, partial, eye their hopeful years;  
 Anticipation forward points the view.  
 The mother, wi' her needle an' her shears,  
 Gars auld claes look amaisht as weel's the new;  
 The father mixes a' wi' admonition due.

\* \* \* \* \*

"The cheerfu' supper done, wi' serious face,  
 They round the ingle form a circle wide;  
 The sire turns o'er, wi' patriarchal grace,  
 The big *ha'-Bible*, ance his father's pride:  
 His bonnet reverently is laid aside.  
 His lyart haffets wearing thin an' bare;  
 Those strains that once did sweet in Zion glide,  
 He wales a portion with judicious care;  
 And '*Let us worship God*,' he says, with solemn air."

Again, though this is a minor point, when Burns rose, the Scottish Doric, so rich in poetry and humor, was rapidly dying out. The use of it was accounted vulgar. Even Burns himself was implored, almost on bended knees, by eminent scholars and poets to employ modern English. But, though the *man* half consented, the *poet* remained firm, and we are deeply thankful for it, for Burns is never at ease when using English. Most of his non-Doric poems are feeble and stilted. In this way many most poetic, musical, expressive and humorous words and phrases have been preserved, some of which have since been incorporated with the language. Of such are: airt, anent, auld lang syne, bicker, bien, birl, brae, busk, bonnie, caller, canny, cantie, cozie, couthie, crone, croon, dirl, dool, dour, dowre, drumly, eyrie, ferlie, fey, gloaming, gowan, ingle-side, leal, lift (the sky), lin, lyart, malison, mirk, rowan, raid, skaith, slogan, sonsie, spate, swirl, thud, tryst, wraith and wee.

But the great boon Burns conferred upon English Literature was in giving the deathblow to the sickly sentimentalism and affected style of the followers of Pope, and restoring nature to Poetry. He spoke directly *from* the heart and *to* the heart, and by his naturalness, fresh-

ness and vigor, made the stilted and unemotional language of the so-called Classical poets sound ridiculous.

As to the charges brought against Burns, that much of his life and writings has exercised a demoralizing influence, they are hardly worth refutation. Side by side, in nearly every Scottish household all over the world, will be found the Bible and Burns, and I have yet to learn that the former is less reverently studied to-day than it was prior to Burns's time. The smutches upon his page are few and insignificant, being of that broad and open kind which stains so much more deeply the pages of Chaucer, while the errors of his life stand as beacon-lights to warn men off the perilous reefs and shoals on which poor Burns made shipwreck of his character and life. If he sinned deeply; deeply and bitterly did he repent and suffer; and surely if ever excuse could be made for man, it is for him. Cursed from birth with periodical fits of profound hypochondria; dowered with the perilous sensibility of genius—keenly alive to the sorrows as well as the joys of life; animated by over-mastering impulses and masterful passions; living in an atmosphere of cant and ultra-calvinism from which all the finer instincts and generous impulses of his nature revolted; raised at a bound from obscurity and poverty to the throne (vacant for three centuries) of Scottish song; feted and caressed and made much of by lords and ladies, and the dilettanti of Edinburgh, then coldly dropped like a disused glove, to be buffeted about by fresh misfortunes; appointed exciseman and having dangerous hospitalities thrust upon him at every turn; his proud spirit rebelling against the inequalities of fortune, and the insults of the great; hypochondria constantly hovering over him, and driving him to seek refuge from himself in the pleasures of company;—was it to be wondered at that he went astray? And yet, we know for a certainty, that all the duties of his office were punctually discharged; and though receiving only a pittance by way of income he died in no man's debt. In no man's debt! Nay, leaving every man in debt to him,—a debt which humanity will continue to owe

"As long as the heart hath sorrows,  
As long as life hath woes."

It should be borne in mind too, that public opinion and customs have changed radically during the last hundred years. In Burns's time drinking was looked upon as a social virtue; the capacity to drink as a sort of criterion of manhood. Everybody drank; and if the church beadle could not swear he had seen the minister drunk, it was because

he himself had been always blin' fou' ere his Reverence had begun to warm to his toddy. Then, again, the prevailing creed of those days, held Scotland in an iron and unrelenting grasp, and "Holy Willie's Prayer," then considered blasphemous would hardly be thought too extreme by many modern preachers, even among those who are considered orthodox.

It is easy for him who has never been tempted to throw the first stone; easy for him who lapped in luxury, can look down from lofty lotus-beds of ease upon the sorrowing, suffering, toiling poor to condemn such as Burns for miserable sinners, and thank God they are not as he. But surely no man or woman, who knows what it is to be tempted and, it may be, to fall, will refuse to poor Burns the indulgence he craves for others in the christian lines:

"Then gently scan your brother Man,  
Still gentler sister Woman;  
Tho' they may gang a *little* wrang,  
To step aside is human;  
One point must still be greatly dark,  
The moving Why they do it;  
And just as lamely can ye mark  
How far, perhaps, they rue it."

But apart from these and similar considerations we are content to let his poetry be Burns' sole apology, Like his character it is marred by many defects. Much of it is puerile, some of it inartistic, a very small portion indecent. As in social intercourse he sometimes displayed want of tact, and the obtrusive brusqueness of a proud spirit desirous of asserting its dignity, so his verse is often defaced with bitter taunts and epithets, peculiarly adapted for widening and deepening the already too wide gulf which separates the poor and the wealthy. But making due allowance for all his faults, what a splendid legacy has he not bequeathed to Scotland and the world! His is a name to conjure with among his countrymen the wide world over. A verse of "Auld Lang Syne" will obtain for you an easy entrance into a Scotchman's house, whether it be a thatched biggin' in the wilds of Morven, a canvass tent in India, or a brown-stone front in San Francisco. It is an open sesame wherever you go. The workman as he sweats at his daily toil, looks his employer in the face and remembers that "The rank is but the guinea stamp, A man's a man for a' that." Young Jockie, the day's work done, as he dons his Sunday best and steps blithely out to keep his tryst with Maggie, hums softly to himself:

"O' a' the airts the win' can blaw,  
 I dearly loe the West,  
 For there the bonny lassie lives,  
 The lass that I loe best;"

And Maggie, whose tell-tale blushes betray her, secretly meets her mother's reproaches with the familiar query—

"Gin a body meet a body  
 Comin' thro' the rye,  
 Gin a body kiss a body  
 Need a body cry?"

Grown up, and in their turn surrounded by toddlin' little ones, the faithful wife can comfort her husband—her Jo, to use the tender Scottish synonym, which blends both husband and lover in one tender word—with the touching lines:

John Anderson, my Jo, John,  
 We clamb the hill thegither;  
 And monie a canty day, John,  
 We've had wi' ane anither;  
 Now we maun totter down, John,  
 But hand in hand we'll go,  
 And sleep thegither at the foot  
 John Anderson, my Jo."

Could anything be more beautiful—beautiful with a pathos that is almost painful in its intensity—a pathos that lies too deep for tears. In a few lines he draws a picture of ideal married life that summons up a whole world of pure and lovely and tender associations, and we see as with the naked eye, the brave young lad and lass starting out in life, breasting the hill bravely together, and then in the sunset of a beautiful life, slowly, wearily but quietly glad, tottering down the slope, hand in hand, as all through life they have been heart in heart, to the little God's acre, where—life's fitful fever over—they sleep together at the foot. With these lines still in your ears, its pathos fluttering at your heart, can any one be surprised to learn that our own great, gentle-hearted poet Longfellow once told the writer that of all poets—and he had read and studied all—Robert Burns nestled most closely to his heart?



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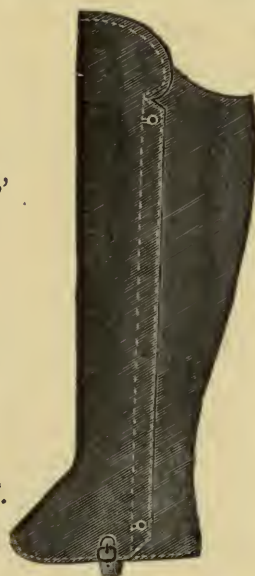
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