THE WORKS
OF
ROBERT BURNS:
INCLUDING
HIS LETTERS TO CLARINDA, AND THE WHOLE OF HIS SUPPRESSED POEMS:
WITH
AN ESSAY
ON HIS LIFE, GENIUS, AND CHARACTER.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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OF

THE THIRD VOLUME.

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

No. 2.

TO THE SAME.

My dear E.

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

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

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

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

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

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

No. 3.

TO THE SAME.

My dear E.

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

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

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

No. 4.

TO THE SAME.

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

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

No. 5.

TO MR. WILLIAM BURNS.

Honoured Sir, Irvine, Dec. 27, 1781.

I have purposely delayed writing, in the hope that I should have the pleasure of seeing you on New-year's day; but work comes so hard upon us, that I do not choose to be absent on that account, as well as for some other little reasons, which I shall tell you at meeting. My health is nearly the same as when you were here, only my sleep is a little sounder, and, on the whole, I am rather better than otherwise, though I mend by very slow degrees. The weakness of my nerves has so debilitated my mind, that I dare neither review past wants,
nor look forward into futurity; for the least anxiety or pertubation in my breast produces most unhappy effects on my whole frame. Sometimes, indeed, when for an hour or two my spirits are a little lightened, I *glimmer* a little into futurity; but my principal, and indeed my only pleasurable employment, is looking backwards and forwards in a moral and religious way. I am quite transported at the thought, that ere long, perhaps very soon, I shall bid an eternal adieu to all the pains and uneasiness, and disquietudes of this weary life; for I assure you I am heartily tired of it; and, if I do not very much deceive myself, I could contentedly and gladly resign it.

The soul, uneasy, and confin'd at home,
Rests and expatiates in a life to come.

It is for this reason I am more pleased with the 15th, 16th, and 17th verses of the 7th chapter of Revelations, than with any ten times as many verses in the whole Bible, and would not exchange the noble enthusiasm with which they inspire me for all that this world has to offer. As for this world, I despair of ever making a figure in it. I am not formed for the bustle of the busy, nor the flutter of the gay. I shall never again be capable of entering into such scenes. Indeed I am altogether unconcerned at the thoughts of this life. I foresee that poverty and obscurity probably await me, and I am in some measure prepared, and daily
preparing to meet them. I have but just time and paper to return you my grateful thanks for the lessons of virtue and piety you have given me, which were too much neglected at the time of giving them, but which, I hope, have been remembered ere it is yet to late. Present my dutiful respects to my mother, and my compliments to Mr. and Mrs. Muir; and with wish-you a merry New-year's-day, I shall conclude.

I am, honoured Sir, your dutiful son,

ROBERT BURNS.

P. S. My meal is nearly out; but I am going to borrow, till I get more.

No. 6.

TO MR. JOHN MURDOCH,

SCHOOLMASTER, STAPLES INN BUILDINGS, LONDON.

Dear Sir,

Lochlee, 15th January, 1783.

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

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

Dear Sir, Yours, &c.

No. 7.

TO MR. RIDDEL.

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

"Observations, Hints, Songs, Scraps of Poetry, &c. by R. B."—a man who had little art in mak-
ing money, and still less in keeping it; but was, however, a man of some sense, and a great deal of honesty, and unbounded good-will to every creature, rational and irrational. As he was but little indebted to scholastic education, and bred at a plough-tail, his performances must be strongly tinctured with his unpolished, rustic way of life; but as I believe they are really his own, it may be some entertainment to a curious observer of human nature, to see how a ploughman thinks and feels, under the pressure of love, ambition, anxiety, grief, with the like cares and passions, which, however diversified by the modes and manners of life, operate pretty much alike, I believe, on all the species.

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

Pleasing, when youth is long expir'd, to trace
The forms our pencil, or our pen designed!
Such was our youthful air, and shape, and face,
Such the soft image of our youthful mind.

Notwithstanding all that has been said against love, respecting the folly and weakness it leads a young inexperienced mind into; still I think it in a great measure deserves the highest encomiums that have been passed on it. If any thing on earth deserves the name of rapture or transport, it is the feelings of green
eighteen, in the company of the mistress of his heart when she repays him with an equal return of affection.

\[\text{August.}\]

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

\[
\text{As tow\'rd her cot he jogg\'d along,}
\text{Her name was frequent in his song,}
\]

For my own part, I never had the least thought or inclination of turning poet till I got once heartily in love; and then rhyme and song were, in a manner, the spontaneous language of my heart.

\[\text{September.}\]

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

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

March, 1784.

I have often observed, in the course of my experience of human life, that every man, even the worst, has something good about him; though very often nothing else than a happy temperament of constitution inclining him to this or that virtue. For this reason, no man can say in what degree any other person, beside himself, can be, with strict justice, called wicked. Let any of the strictest character for regularity of conduct among us, examine impartially how many vices he has never been guilty of, not from any care or vigilance, but for want of opportunity, or some accidental circumstance intervening; how many of the weaknesses of mankind he has escaped, because he was out of the line of such temptation; and what often, if not always, weighs more than all
the rest, how much he is indebted to the world’s good opinion, because the world does not know all: I say, any man who can thus think, will scan the failings, nay, the faults and crimes, of mankind around him, with a brother’s eye.

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


April.

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

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

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

The wint'ry west extends his blast,
And hail and rain does blow;
Or, the stormy north sends driving forth
The blinding sleet and snow:
While tumbling brown, the burn comes down,
An' roars frae bank to brae;
And bird and beast in covert rest,
And pass the heartless day.

"The sweeping blast, the sky o'ercast,"
The joyless winter-day,
Let others fear, to me more dear
Than all the pride of May:
The tempest's howl, it soothes my soul,
My griefs it seems to join,
The leafless trees my fancy please,
Their fate resembles mine!

Thou Pow'r Supreme, whose mighty scheme
These woes of mine fulfil,
Here, firm, I rest, they must be best,
Because they are Thy will!
Then all I want (O do thou grant
This one request of mine!)
Since to enjoy thou dost deny
Assist me to resign.

* Dr. Young.
Shenstone finely observes, that love-verses, writ without any real passion, are the most nauseous of all conceits; and I have often thought that no man can be a proper critic of love-composition, except he himself, in one or more instances, has been a warm votary of this passion. As I have been all along a miserable dupe to love, and have been led into a thousand weaknesses and follies by it, for that reason I put the more confidence in my critical skill in distinguishing foppery and conceit from real passion and nature. Whether the following song will stand the test, I will not pretend to say, because it is my own; only I can say it was, at the time, genuine from the heart.

Behind yon hills where Lugar flows,
'Mang moors and mosses many, O,
The wint'ry sun the day has clos'd,
And I'll awa to Nannie, O,

The westlin wind blaws load an' shill;
The night's baith mirk and rainy, O;
But I'll get my plaid, an' out I'll steal,
An' owre the hills to Nannie, O.

My Nannie's charming, sweet, an' young;
Nae artfu' wiles to win ye, O;
May ill befa' the flattering tongue
That wad beguile my Nannie, O.

Her face is fair, her heart is true,
As spotless as she's bonie, O:
The op'ning gowan, wet wi' dew,
Nae purer is than Nannie, O.

A country lad is my degree,
An' few there be that ken me, O;
But what care I how few they be,
If I'm welcome ay to Nannie, O.
My riches a' my penny-fee,
An' I maun gude it cannie, O;
But warl's gear ne'er troubles me.
My thoughts are a' my Nanie, O.

Our auld Guidman delights to view
His sheep an' kye thrive bonie, O;
But I'm as blythe that hauds his pleugh,
Au' has nae care but Nanie, O.

Come weal, come woe, I care na by,
I'll tak what Heav'n will sen' me, O;
Nae ither care in life have I,
But live, an' love my Nanie, O.

---

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

As the grand end of human life is to cultivate an intercourse with that Being to whom we owe life, with every enjoyment that can render life delightful; and to maintain an integritive conduct towards our fellow-creatures; that so, by forming piety and virtue into habit, we may be fit members for that society of the pious and the good, which reason and revelation teach us to expect beyond the grave: I do not see that the turn of mind, and pursuits of any son of poverty and obscurity, are in the least more inimical to the sacred interests of piety and virtue, than the, even lawful, bustling, and straining after the world's riches and honours; and I do not see but that he may gain Heaven as well (which, by the bye, is no mean consideration), who steals through the vale of life, amusing himself with every little flower fortune throws in his way; as he who, straining straight forward, and perhaps bespattering all about him, gains some of life's little eminences; where, after all, he can only see and be seen a little more conspicuously than what, in the pride of his heart, he is apt to term the poor, indolent devil he has left behind him.

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

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

This is all worth quoting in my MSS. and more than all. R. B.
No. 8.

TO MR. AIKEN.

Sir, Ayrshire, 1788.

I was with Wilson, my printer, the other day, and settled all by-gone matters between us. After I had paid him all demands, I made him the offer of the second edition, on the hazard of being paid out of the first and readiest, which he declines. By his account, the paper of a thousand copies would cost about twenty-seven pounds, and the printing about fifteen or sixteen; he offers to agree to this for the printing, if I will advance for the paper; but this you know, is out of my power; so farewell hopes of a second edition till I grow richer!—an epocha which, I think, will arrive at the payment of the British national debt.

There is scarcely any thing hurts me so much in being disappointed of my second edition as not having it in my power to show my gratitude to Mr. Ballantyne, by publishing my poem of The Brigs of Ayr. I would detest myself as a wretch if I thought I were capable, in a very long life, of forgetting the honest, warm, and tender delicacy with which he enters into my interests. I am sometimes pleased with myself in my grateful sensations; but I believe, on the whole, I have very little merit in it, as
my gratitude is not a virtue, the consequence of reflexion, but sheerly the instinctive emotion of a heart too inattentive to allow worldly maxims and views to settle into selfish habits.

I have been feeling all the various rotations and movements within respecting the excise. There are may things plead strongly against it; the uncertainty of getting soon into business, the consequences of my follies, which may perhaps make it impracticable for me to stay at home; and besides, I have for some time been pining under secret wretchedness, from causes which you pretty well know—the pang of disappointment, the sting of pride, with some wandering stabs of remorse, which never fail to settle on my vitals like vultures, when attention is not called away by the calls of society or the vagaries of the muse. Even in the hour of social mirth, my gaiety is the madness of an intoxicated criminal under the hands of the executioner. All these reasons urge me to go abroad; and to all these reasons I have only one answer—the feelings of a father. This, in the present mood I am in, overbalances everything that can be laid in the scale against it.

You may perhaps think it an extravagant fancy, but it is a sentiment which strikes home to my very soul: though sceptical in some points of our current belief, yet I think I have every evidence for the reality of a life beyond the stinted bourne of our present existence; if
so, then how should I, in the presence of that tremendous Being, the Author of existence—how should I meet the reproaches of those who stand to me in the dear relation of children, whom I deserted in the smiling innocency of helpless infancy? O thou great unknown Power! thou Almighty God! who has lighted up reason in my breast, and blessed me with immortality! I have frequently wandered from that order and regularity necessary for the perfection of thy works, yet thou hast never left me nor forsaken me!

Since I wrote the forgoing sheet, I have seen something of the storm of mischief thickening over my folly-devoted head. Should you, my friends, my benefactors, be successful in your applications for me, perhaps it may not be in my power in that way to reap the fruit of your friendly efforts. What I have written in the preceding pages is the settled tenor of my present resolution: but should inimical circumstances forbid me closing with your kind offer, or, enjoying it, only threaten to entail farther misery—

To tell the truth, I have little reason for this last complaint, as the world, in general, has been kind to me, fully up to my deserts. I was, for some time past, fast getting into the pining distrustful snarl of the misanthrope. I saw myself alone, unfit for the struggle of life,
directed atmosphere of fortune, while, all defenceless, I looked about in vain for a cover. It never occurred to me, at least never with the force it deserved, that this world is a busy scene, and man a creature destined for a progressive struggle; and that, however I might possess a warm heart and inoffensive manners (which last, by the bye, was rather more that I could well boast) still, more than these passive qualities, there was something to be done. When all my school-fellows and youthful compeers (those misguided few excepted, who joined, to use a Gentoo phrase, the hallachores of the human race), were striking off with eager hope and earnest intent on some one or other of the many paths of busy life, I was "standing idle in the market place," or only left the chase of the butterfly from flower to flower, to hunt fancy from whim to whim.

You see, Sir, that if to know one’s errors were a probability of mending them, I stand a fair chance; but, according to the reverend Westminster divines, though conviction must precede conversion, it is far from always implying it.**

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* This letter was evidently written under the distress of mind occasioned by our Poet’s separation from Mrs. Burns,
TO MRS. DUNLOP,
OF DUNLOP.

Madam,

Ayrshire, 1786.

I am truly sorry I was not at home yesterday, when I was so much honoured with your order for my copies, and incomparably more by the handsome compliments your are pleased to pay my poetic abilities. I am fully persuaded that there is not any class of mankind so feelingly alive to the titillations of applause as the sons of Parnassus; nor is it easy to conceive how the heart of the poor bard dances with rapture when those whose character in life gives them a right to be polite judges, honour him with their approbation. Had you been thoroughly acquainted with me, Madam, you could not have touched my darling heart-chord more sweetly than by noticing my attempts to celebrate your illustrious ancestor, the Saviour of his Country.

Great patriot hero! ill requited chief.

The first book I met with in my early years, which I perused with pleasure, was The Life of Hannibal: the next was The History of Sir William Wallace. For several of my earlier years I had few other authors; and many a solitary hour have I stole out, after the laborious voca-
shrinking at every rising cloud in the chance-
tions of the day, to shed a tear over their glo-
rious but unfortunate stories. In those boyish
days I remember in particular being struck
with that part of Wallace’s story where these
lines occur—

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

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

No. 10.

TO MRS. STEWART,
OF STAIR.

Madam, 1786.

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

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

One feature of your character I shall ever with grateful pleasure remember—the recep-

* The song enclosed is that given in the following Letter.
tion I got, when I had the honour of waiting on you at Stair. I am little acquainted with politeness: but I know a good deal of benevolence of temper and goodness of heart. Surely, did those in exalted stations know how happy they could make some classes of their inferiors by condescension and affability, they would never stand so high, measuring out with every look the height of their elevation, but condescend as sweetly as did Mrs. Stewart of Stair.

No. 11.

TO MISS ———.

Moss-giel, 18th Nov. 1786.

Poets are such outré beings, so much the children of wayward fancy and capricious whim, that I believe the world generally allows them a larger latitude in the laws of propriety than the sober sons of judgment and prudence. I mention this as an apology for the liberties that a nameless stranger has taken with you in the enclosed poem, which he begs leave to present you with. Whether it has poetical merit any way worthy of the theme, I am not the proper judge; but it is the best my abilities can produce; and what to a good heart will perhaps be a superior grace, it is equally sincere as fervent.
The scenery was nearly taken from real life, though I dare say, Madam, you do not recollect it, as I believe you scarcely noticed the poetic **reverie** as he wandered by you. I had roved out as chance directed in the favourite haunts of my muse, on the banks of the Ayr, to view nature in all the gaiety of the vernal year. The evening sun was flaming over the distant western hills; not a breath stirred the crimson opening blossom, or the verdant spreading leaf. It was a golden moment for a poetic heart. I listened to the feathered warblers, pouring their harmony on every hand, with a congenial kindred regard, and frequently turned out of my path, lest I should disturb their little songs, or frighten them to another station. Surely, said I to myself, he must be a wretch indeed, who, regardless of your harmonious endeavour to please him, can eye your elusive flights to discover your secret recesses, and to rob you of all the property nature gives you, your dearest comforts, your helpless nestlings. Even the hoary hawthorn-twigs that shot across the way, what heart at such a time but must have been interested in its welfare, and wished it preserved from the rudely-browsing cattle, or the withering eastern blast? Such was the scene, and such the hour, when, in a corner of my prospect, I spied one of the fairest pieces of Nature's workmanship that ever crowned a poetic landscape, or met a poet's eye, those visionary bards excepted who hold commerce
with aerial beings! Had calumny and villany taken my walk, they had at that moment sworn eternal peace with such an object!

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

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

I have the honour to be, Madam,

Your most obedient, and very humble servant,

Robert Burns.

'Twas even—the dewy fields were green,
On every blade the pearls hung;
The Zephyr wanton'd round the bean,
And bore its fragrant sweets along:
In every glen the mavis sang,
All nature list'ning seemed the while,
Except where green-wood echoes rang;
Amang the braes o' Ballochmyle.

With careless step I onward strayed,
My heart rejoic'd in nature's joy,
When musing in a lonely glade,
A maiden fair I chanc'd to spy;
Her look was like the morning's eye,
Her air like nature's vernal smile,
Perfection whispered passing by,
Behold the lass o' Ballochmyle!

Fair is the morn in flowery May,
And sweet is night in autumn mild;
When roving through the garden gay,
Or wand'ring in the lonely wild;
But woman, nature's darling child!
There all her charms she does compile;
Even there her other works are foil'd
By the bonie lass o' Ballochmyle,
BURNS'S LETTERS.

O had she been a country maid,
And I the happy country swain,
Tho' sheltered in the lowest shed
That ever rose on Scotland's plain,
Tho' weary winter's wind and rain,
With joy, with rapture, I would toil;
And nightly to my bosom strain
The bonie lass o' Ballochmyle.

Then pride might climb the slipp'ry steep,
Where fame and honours lofty shine;
And thirst of gold might tempt the deep,
Or downward seek the Indian mine.
Give me the cot below the pine,
To tend the flocks or till the soil,
And every day have joys divine,
With the bonie lass o' Ballochmyle.

No. 12.

TO MR. CHALMERS.

My dear Friend,

Edinburgh, 27th Dec. 1786.

I confess I have sinned the sin for which there is hardly any forgiveness—ingratitude to friendship—in not writing you sooner; but, of all men living, I had intended to send you an entertaining letter; and by all the plodding, stupid powers that, in nodding conceited majesty, preside over the dull routine of business—a heavily solemn oath this!—I am, and have been ever since I came to Edinburgh, as unfit to write a letter of humour as to write a commentary on the Revelations.
I enclose you two poems I have carded and spun since I past Glenbuck. One blank in the Address to Edinburgh, "Fair B—-", is the heavenly Miss Burnet, daughter to Lord Monboddo, at whose house I have had the honour to be more than once. There has not been anything nearly like her, in all the combinations of beauty, grace, and goodness, the great Creator has formed, since Milton's Eve on the first day of her existence.

I have sent you a parcel of subscription-bills, and have written to Mr. Ballantyne and Mr. Aiken to call on you for some of them if they want them. My direction is—Care of Andrew Bruce, merchant, Bridge Street.

No. 13.

TO THE EARL OF EGLINTON.

My Lord, Edinburgh, January, 1787.

As I have but slender pretensions to philosophy, I cannot rise to the exalted ideas of a citizen of the world; but I have all those national prejudices which, I believe, glow peculiarly strong in the breast of a Scotchman. There is scarcely any thing to which I am so feelingly alive as the honour and welfare of my country; and, as a poet, I have no higher enjoyment than singing her sons and daughters. Fate
had cast my station in the veriest shades of life; but never did a heart pant more ardently than mine to be distinguished; though, till very lately, I looked in vain on every side for a ray of light. It is easy then to guess how much I was gratified with the countenance and approbation of one of my country's most illustrious sons, when Mr. Wauchope called on me yesterday on the part of your lordship. Your munificence, my lord, certainly deserves my very grateful acknowledgements; but your patronage is a bounty peculiarly suited to my feelings. I am not master enough of the etiquette of life to know whether there be not some impropriety in troubling your lordship with my thanks; but, my heart whispered me to do it. From the emotions of my inmost soul I do it. Selfish ingratitude, I hope, I am incapable of; and mercenary servility, I trust, I shall ever have so much honest pride as to detest.

No. 14.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Madam,

Edinburgh, 15th January, 1787.

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

The word you object to in the mention I have made of my glorious countryman and your immortal ancestor, is indeed borrowed from Thomson; but it does not strike me as an improper epithet. I distrusted my own judgment on your finding fault with it, and applied for the opinion of some of the literati here, who honour me with their critical strictures, and they all allow it to be proper. The song you ask I cannot recollect, and I have not a copy of it. I have not composed any thing on the great Wallace, except what you have seen in print; and the enclosed, which I will print in this
You will see I have mentioned some others of the name. When I composed my Vision, long ago, I had attempted a description of Koyle; of which the additional stanzas are a part, as it originally stood. My heart glows with a wish to be able to do justice to the merits of the Saviour of his Country, which, sooner or later, I shall at least attempt.

You are afraid I shall grow intoxicated with my prosperity as a poet. Alas! Madam, I know myself and the world too well. I do not mean any airs of affected modesty; I am willing to believe that my abilities deserved some notice; but in a most enlightened, informed age and nation, when poetry is and has been the study of men of the first natural genius, aided with all the powers of polite learning, polite books, and polite company—to be dragged forth to the full glare of learned and polite observation, with all my imperfections of awkward rusticity and crude unpolished ideas on my head—I assure you, Madam, I do not dissemble when I tell you I tremble for the consequences. The novelty of a poet in my obscure situation, without any of those advantages which are reckoned necessary for that character, at least at this time of day, has raised a partial tide of public notice which has borne me to a height where I am absolutely, feelingly certain, my abilities are inadequate to

* Stanzas in the Vision, Vol. i. beginning "By stately tow'r or palace fair," and ending with the first Duan.
support me; and too surely do I see that time when the same tide will leave me, and recede, perhaps, as far below the mark of truth.

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

No. 15.

TO DR. MOORE.

Sir,

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

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

No. 16.

TO DR. MOORE.

Sir, Edinburgh, 15th February, 1787.

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

He felt each storm that on the mountain blows,
Nor ever knew the shelter of the vale.
By genius in her native vigour burst,
On nature with impassion'd look he gazed;
Then through the cloud of adverse fortune burst
Indiguent, and in light unborrow'd blazed.
Scotia! from rude affliction shield thy bard,
His heaven-taught numbers Fame herself will guard.

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

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

No. 17.

TO THE EARL OF GLENCAIRN.

My Lord,

Edinburgh, 1787.

I wanted to purchase a profile of your lordship, which I was told was to be got in town; but I am truly sorry to see that a blundering painter has spoiled a "human face divine." The enclosed stanzas I intended to have written below a picture or profile of your lordship, could I have been so happy as to procure one with anything of a likeness.

As I will soon return to my shades, I wanted to have something like a material object for my gratitude; I wanted to have it in my power to say to a friend, There is my noble patron, my generous benefactor. Allow me, my lord, to publish these verses. I conjure your lordship by the honest throe of gratitude, by the generous wish of benevolence, by all the powers and feelings which compose the magnanimous...
mind, do not deny me this petition*. I owe much to your lordship; and what has not in some other instances always been the case with me, the weight of the obligation is a pleasing load. I trust I have a heart as independent as your lordship's, than which I can say nothing more; and I would not be beholden to favours that would crucify my feelings. Your dignified character in life, and manner of supporting that character, are flattering to my pride; and I would be jealous of the purity of my grateful attachment, where I was under the patronage of one of the much favoured sons of fortune.

Almost every poet has celebrated his patrons, particularly when they were names dear to fame, and illustrious in their country. Allow me, then, my lord, if you think the verses have intrinsic merit, to tell the world how much I have the honour to be

Your lordship's highly indebted,
And ever grateful humble servant.

* It does not appear that the Earl granted this request. The verses alluded to have not been found among the MSS.
No. 18.

TO THE EARL OF BUCHAN.

My Lord,

The honour your lordship has done me, by your notice and advice in yours of the 1st instant, I shall ever gratefully remember:

Praise from thy lips 'tis mine with joy to boast,
They best can give it who deserve it most.

Your lordship touches the darling chord of my heart, when you advise me to fire my muse at Scottish story and Scottish scenes. I wish for nothing more than to make a leisurely pilgrimage through my native country; to sit and muse on those once hard-contended fields, where Caledonia, rejoicing, saw her bloody lion borne through broken ranks to victory and fame; and, catching the inspiration, to pour the deathless names in song. But, my lord, in the midst of these enthusiastic reveries, a long-visaged, dry, moral-looking phantom strides across my imagination, and pronounces these emphatic words, "I, Wisdom, dwell with prudence."

This, my lord, is unanswerable. I must return to my humble station, and woo my rustic muse in my wonted way at the plough-tail. Still, my lord, while the drops of life warm my
heart, gratitude to that dear-loved country in which I boast my birth, and gratitude to those her distinguished sons who have honoured me so much with their patronage and approbation, shall, while stealing through my humble shades, ever distend my bosom, and at times, as now, draw forth the swelling tear.

No. 19.

TO ———

My dear Sir,

You may think, and too justly, that I am a selfish ungrateful fellow, having received so many repeated instances of kindness from you, and yet never putting pen to paper to say—thank you; but if you knew what a devil of a life my conscience has led me on that account, your good heart would think yourself too much avenged. By the bye, there is nothing in the whole frame of man which seems to me so unaccountable as that thing called conscience. Had the troublesome yelping cur powers efficient to prevent a mischief, he might be of use: but at the beginning of the business, his feeble efforts are to the workings of passion as the infant frosts of an autumnal morning to the unclouded fervour of the rising sun: and no sooner are the tumultuous doings of the wicked deed over, than, amidst the bitter native conse-
quences of folly, in the very vortex of our horrors, up starts conscience, and harrows us with the feelings of the damned.

I have enclosed you, by way of expiation, some verse and prose*, that, if they merit a place in your truly entertaining miscellany, you are welcome to.

No. 20.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Madam,

Edinburgh, March 22, 1787.

I read your letter with watery eyes. A little, very little while ago, I had scarce a friend but the stubborn pride of my own bosom; now I am distinguished, patronized, befriended by you. Your friendly advices, I will not give them the cold name of criticisms, I receive with reverence. I have made some small alterations in what I before had printed. I have the advice of some very judicious friends among the literati here; but with them I sometimes find it necessary to claim the privilege of thinking for myself. The noble Earl of Glencairn, to whom I owe more than to any man, does me the honour of giving me his strictures; his

* His letter to the Bailies of Canongate, Edinburgh, (requesting permission to erect a stone to the memory of Fergusson), and his epitaph on that unfortunate poet. They are given in his Life.
hints, with respect to impropriety or indelicacy, I follow implicitly.

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

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

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

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

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

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

No. 21.

TO THE SAME.

Madam,

Edinburgh, 15th April, 1787.

There is an affectation of gratitude which I dislike. The periods of Johnson and the pauses of Sterne may hide a selfish heart. For
my part, Madam, I trust I have too much pride for servility, and too little prudence for selfishness. I have this moment broke open your letter, but

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

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

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

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

No. 22.

TO DR. MOORE.

Edinburgh, 23d April, 1787

I received the books, and sent the one you mentioned to Mrs. Dunlop. I am ill-skilled in beating the coverts of imagination for metaphors

* Adam Smith.
of gratitude. I thank you, Sir, for the honour you have done me; and to my latest hour will warmly remember it. To be highly pleased with your book, is what I have in common with the world; but to regard these volumes as a mark of the author's friendly esteem, is a still more supreme gratification.

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

My most respectful compliments to Miss W. If once this tangent flight of mine were over, and I were returned to my wonted leisurely motion in my old circle, I may probably endeavour to return her poetical compliment in kind.
No. 23.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Edinburgh, 30th April, 1787.

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

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

I am happy, Madam, that some of my own favourite pieces are distinguished by your particular approbation. For my Dream, which has unfortunately incurred your loyal displeasure, I hope in four weeks, or less, to have the honour of appearing, at Dunlop, in its defence in person.
No. 24.

TO THE REVEREND DR. HUGH BLAIR.

Reverend and much respected Sir,

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

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

Lawn-Market, Edinburgh, 3d May, 1787.
No. 25.

TO MR. WALKER, BLAIR OF ATHOLE.

My dear Sir,

Inverness, 5th September, 1787.

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

The little "angel band!"—I declare I prayed for them very sincerely to-day at the Fall of Fyars. I shall never forget the fine family-piece I saw at Blair; the amiable, the truly noble duchess, with her smiling little seraph in her lap, at the head of the table; the lovely "olive plants," as the Hebrew bard finely says, round the happy mother; the beautiful Mrs. G——; the lovely, sweet Miss C. &c. I wish

* The humble Petition of Bruar-Water, vol. i. p. 188.
I had the powers of Guido to do them justice! My Lord Duke's kind hospitality—markedly kind indeed—Mr. G. of F—'s charms of conversation—Sir W. M—'s friendship—in short, the recollection of all that polite, agreeable company, raises an honest glow in my bosom.

No. 26.

TO MR. GILBERT BURNS.

My dear Brother, Edinburgh, 17th September, 1787.

I arrived here safe yesterday evening, after a tour of twenty-two days, and travelling near six hundred miles, windings included. My farthest stretch was about ten miles beyond Inverness. I went through the heart of the Highlands, by Crieff, Taymouth, the famous seat of Lord Breadalbane, down the Tay, among cascades and druidical circles of stones, to Dunkeld, a seat of the Duke of Athole; thence cross Tay, and up one of his tributary streams to Blair of Athole, another of the Duke's seats, where I had the honour of spending nearly two days with his Grace and family; thence many miles through a wild country, among cliffs grey with eternal snows, and gloomy savage glens, till I crossed Spey and went down the stream through Strathspey, so famous in Scottish music; Badenoch, &c., till I reached Grant Castle, where I spent half a day with Sir James
Grant and family; and then crossed the country for Fort George, but called by the way at Cawdor, the ancient seat of Macbeth; there I saw the identical bed, in which tradition says king Duncan was murdered: lastly, from Fort George to Inverness.

I returned by the coast, through Nairn, Forres, and so on, to Aberdeen; thence to Stonehive, where James Burness, from Montrose, met me by appointment. I spent two days among our relations, and found our aunts, Jean and Isabel, still alive, and hale old women. John Caird, though born the same year with our father, walks as vigorously as I can: they have had several letters from his son in New York. William Brand is likewise a stout old fellow; but further particulars I delay till I see you, which will be in two or three weeks. The rest of my stages are not worth rehearsing. Warm as I was from Ossian's country, where I had seen his very grave, what cared I for fishing towns or fertile carses? I slept at the famous Brodie of Brodie's one night, and dined at Gordon Castle next day with the duke, duchess, and family. I am thinking to cause my old mare to meet me, by means of John Ronald, at Glasgow; but you shall hear further from me before I leave Edinburgh. My duty, and many compliments from the north, to my mother; and my brotherly compliments to the rest. I have been trying for a birth for William, but am not likely to be successful. Farewell.
No. 27.

TO — DALRYMPLE, ESQ. OF ORANGEFIELD.

Dear Sir,

Edinburgh, 1787.

I suppose the devil is so elated with his success with you, that he is determined by a coup de main to complete his purposes on you all at once, in making you a poet. I broke open the letter you sent me; hummed over the rhymes; and, as I saw they were extempore, said to myself they were very well; but when I saw at the bottom a name that I shall ever value with grateful respect, "I gapit wide but naething spak." I was nearly as much struck as the friends of Job, of affliction-bearing memory, when they sat down with him seven days and seven nights, and spake not a word.

I am naturally of a superstitious cast, and as soon as my wonder-scared imagination regained its consciousness and resumed its functions, I cast about what this mania of yours might portend. My foreboding ideas had the wide stretch of possibility; and several events, great in their magnitude, and important in their consequences, occurred to my fancy. The downfall of the conclave, or the crushing of the cork rumps; a ducal coronet to Lord George G ——, and the protestant interest; or Saint Peter's keys to ......
You want to know how I come on. I am just in statu quo, or, not to insult a gentleman with my Latin, “in auld use and wont.” The noble Earl of Glencairn took me by the hand to-day, and interested himself in my concerns, with a goodness like that benevolent Being, whose image he so richly bears. He is a stronger proof of the immortality of the soul than any that philosophy ever produced. A mind like his can never die. Let the worshipful squire, H. L., or the reverend Mass J. M. go into their primitive nothing. At best they are but ill-digested lumps of chaos, only one of them strongly tinged with bituminous particles and sulphurous effluvia. But my noble patron, eternal as the heroic swell of magnanimity, and the generous throb of benevolence, shall look on with princely eye at “the war of elements, the wreck of matter, and the crush of worlds.”

No. 28.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Edinburgh, 21st January, 1788.

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

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

I am ashamed of all this; for though I do want bravery for the warfare of life, I could wish, like some other soldiers, to have as much fortitude or cunning as to dissemble or conceal my cowardice.

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

No. 29.

TO MISS M——N.

Saturday noon, No. 2, St. James Square, New Town.

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

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

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

The hinge of your box I put into the hands of the proper connoisseur—but it is like Willy Gaw's skate, past redemption. The broken glass, likewise, went under review—but deliberative wisdom thought it would too much endanger the whole fabric.

I am, dear Madam, with all sincerity of enthusiasm,

Your very humble servant,

Robert Burns.

No. 30.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Edinburgh, 12th February, 1783.

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

No. 31.

TO THE SAME.

Madam,

Mossgiel, 7th March, 1788.

The last paragraph in yours of the 30th February affected me most, so I shall begin my answer where you ended your letter. That I am often a sinner with any little wit I have, I do confess: but I have taxed my recollection to no purpose, to find out when it was employed against you. I hate an ungenerous sarcasm a great deal worse than I do the devil; at least as Milton describes him; and though I may be rascally enough to be sometimes guilty of it myself, I cannot endure it in others. You, my honoured friend, who cannot appear in any light, but you are sure of being respectable—you can afford to pass by an occasion to display your wit, because you may depend for fame on your sense; or if you chuse to be silent, you know you can rely on the gratitude of many and the esteem of all; but God help us who are wits or witlings by profession, if we stand not for fame there, we sink unsupported!
I am highly flattered by the news you tell me of Coila*. I may say to the fair painter, who does me so much honour, as Dr. Beattie says to Ross the poet, of his Muse Scota, from which, by the bye, I took the idea of Coila. It is a poem of Beattie's in the Scottish dialect, which perhaps you have never seen.

Ye shake your head, but o' my legs,
Ye've set auld Scota on her legs:
Lang had she lien wi' buffe and flags,
Bombaz'd and dizzie,
Her fiddle wanted strings and pegs,
Waes me, poor hizzie.

No. 32.

TO MR. M——R, KILMARNOCK.

Mossgiel, 7th March, 1788.

I have partly changed my ideas, my dear friend, since I saw you. I took old Glenconner with me to Mr. Miller's farm, and he was so pleased with it, that I have wrote an offer to Mr. Miller; which, if he accepts, I shall sit down a plain farmer, the happiest of lives when a man can live by it. In this case I shall not stay in Edinburgh above a week. I set out on Monday, and would have come by Kilmarnock,
but there are several small sums owing me for my first edition, about Galston and Newmills; and I shall set off so early as to dispatch my business, and reach Glasgow by night. When I return, I shall devote a forenoon or two to make some kind of acknowledgement for all the kindness I owe your friendship. Now that I hope to settle with some credit and comfort at home, there was not any friendship or friendly correspondence that promised me more pleasure than yours; I hope I will not be disappointed. I trust the Spring will renew your shattered frame, and make your friends happy. You and I have often agreed, that life is no great blessing on the whole. The close of life indeed, to a reasoning eye, is,

Dark as was chaos, ere the infant sun
Was roll’d together, or had try’d his beams
Athwart the gloom profound.

But an honest man has nothing to fear. If we lie down in the grave, the whole man a piece of broken machinery, to moulder with the clods of the valley—be it so—at least there is an end of pain, care, woes, and wants. If that part of us called Mind, does survive the apparent destruction of the man—away with old-wife prejudices and tales! Every age and every nation has had a different set of stories—and as the many are weak, of consequence they have often, perhaps always, been deceived. A man conscious of having acted an honest part among his fellow-creatures—even granting that he may
have been the sport, at times, of passions and instincts—he goes to a great unknown Being, who could have no other end in giving him existence but to make him happy—who gave him those passions and instincts, and well knows their force.

These, my worthy friend, are my ideas; and I know they are not far different from yours. It becomes a man of sense to think for himself—particularly in a case where all men are equally interested, and where, indeed all men are equally in the dark.

Adieu, my dear Sir! God send us a cheerful meeting!

Robert Burns.

No. 33.

TO MR. ROBERT CLEGHORN.

Mauchline, 31st March, 1785.

Yesterday, my dear Sir, as I was riding through a track of melancholy joyless muirs, between Galloway and Ayshire, it being Sunday, I turned my thoughts to psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs; and your favourite air, Captain O'Kean, coming at length in my head, I tried these words to it. You will see that the first part of the tune must be repeated.
THE CHEVALIER'S LAMENT.

The small birds rejoice in the green leaves returning;  
The murmuring streamlet winds clear thro' the vale;  
The hawthorn trees blow in the dews of the morning,  
And wild scatter'd cowslips bedeck the green dale:  

But what can give pleasure, or what can seem fair,  
While the lingering moments are number'd by care?  
No flowers gaily springing, nor birds sweetly singing,  
Can sooth the sad bosom of joyless despair.

The deed that I dar'd, could it merit their malice,  
A king and a father to place on his throne;  
His right are these hills, and his right are these valleys,  
Where the wild beasts find shelter, but I can find none.

But 'tis not my sufferings, thus wretched, forlorn,  
My brave gallant friends, 'tis your ruin I mourn:  
Your deeds prov'd so loyal in hot bloody trial,  
Alas! can I make you no sweeter return!

I am tolerably pleased with these verses, but  
as I have only a sketch of the tune, I leave it  
with you to try if they suit the measure of the  
music.

I am so harassed with care and anxiety, about  
this farming project of mine, that my muse has  
degenerated into the veriest prose-wench that  
ever picked ciuders, or followed a tinker. When  
I am fairly got into the routine of business, I  
shall trouble you with a longer epistle; perhaps  
with some queries respecting farming; at pre-  
sent, the world sits such a load on my mind,  
that it has effaced almost every trace of the  
—in me,  

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

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

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

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

No. 35.

TO PROFESSOR DUGALD STEWART.

Sir,

Mauchline, 3d May, 1788.

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

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

No. 36.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Mauchline, 4th May, 1788.

Dryden's Virgil has delighted me. I do not know whether the critics will agree with me, but the Georgics are to me by far the best of Virgil. It is indeed a species of writing entirely new to me; and has filled my head with a thousand fancies of emulation: but alas! when I read the Georgics and then survey my own powers, it is like the idea of a Shetland poney drawn up by the side of a thorough-bred hunter to start for the plate. I own I am disappointed in the Æneid. Faultless correctness may please, and does highly please the lettered critic; but to that awful character I have not the most distant pretensions. I do not know whether I do not hazard my pretensions to be a critic of any kind, when I say that I think Virgil, in
many instances, a servile copier of Homer. If I had the Odyssey by me, I could parallel many passages where Virgil has evidently copied, but by no means improved Homer. Nor can I think there is any thing of this owing to the translators; for, from every thing I have seen of Dryden, I think him, in genius and fluency of language, Pope's master. I have not perused Tasso enough to form an opinion: in some future letter, you shall have my ideas of him; though I am conscious my criticisms must be very inaccurate and imperfect; as there I have ever felt and lamented my want of learning most.

No. 37.

TO THE SAME.

Madam, 27th May, 1788.

I have been torturing my philosophy to no purpose, to account for that kind partiality of yours, which unlike.................................

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

There are few circumstances relating to the unequal distribution of the good things of this life, that give more vexation (I mean in what I see around me) than the importance the opulent bestow on their trifling family affairs, compared with the very same things on the contracted scale of a cottage. Last afternoon I had the honour to spend an hour or two at a good woman's fireside, where the planks that composed the floor were decorated with a splendid carpet, and the gay table sparkled with silver and china. It is now about term-day, and there has been a revolution among those creatures, who, though in appearance partakers, and equally noble partakers of the same nature with Madame; are from time to time, their nerves, their sinews their health, strength, wisdom, experience, genius, time, nay, a good part of their very thoughts, sold for months and years....

not only to the necessities, the conveniences, but the caprices of the important few*. We talked of the insignificant creatures: nay, notwithstanding their general stupidity and rascality, did some of the poor devils the honour to commend them. But

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* Servants in Scotland are hired from term to term, i.e. from Whitsunday to Martinmas, &c.
light be the turf upon his breast, who taught *Reverence thyself*. We looked down on the unpolished wretches, their impertinent wives and clouterly brats, as the lordly bull does on the little dirty ant-hill, whose puny inhabitants he crushes in the carelessness of his ramble, or tosses in air in the wantonness of his pride.

No. 38.

TO THE SAME.

*Ellisland, 13th June, 1788.*

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

*Goldsmith.*

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

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

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

I found a once much-loved and still much-
loved female, literally and truly cast out to the
mercy of the naked elements, and I enabled
her to purchase a shelter. There is no sporting
with a fellow creature's happiness, or misery.
The most placid good-nature and sweetness
of disposition; a warm heart, gratefully devoted
with all its powers to love me; vigorous health
and sprightly cheerfulness, set off to the best
advantage, by a more than commonly handsome
figure; these, I think, in a woman, may make
a good wife, though she should never have read
a page but the Scriptures of the Old and New
Testament, nor have danced in a brighter as-
sembly than a penny pay-wedding.
No. 39.

TO MR. P. HILL.

My dear Hill,

I shall say nothing at all to your mad present—you have so long and often been of important service to me, and I suppose you mean to go on conferring obligations until I shall not be able to lift up my face before you. In the mean time, as Sir Roger de Coverley, because it happened to be a cold day in which he made his will, ordered his servants great coats for mourning, so, because I have been this week plagued with an indigestion, I have sent you by the carrier a fine old ewe-milk cheese.

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

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

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

David * with his Courant comes, too, across my recollection, and I beg you will help him largely from the said ewe-milk cheese, to enable him to digest those —— bedaubing paragraphs with which he is eternally larding the lean characters of certain great men in a certain great town. I grant you the periods are very well turned; so, a fresh egg is a very good thing; but when thrown at a man in a pillory

* Printer of the Edinburgh Evening Courant.
it does not at all improve his figure, not to mention the irreparable loss of the egg.

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

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

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

Though I have mentioned so many men of law, I shall have nothing to do with them professedly—the faculty are beyond my prescription. As to their clients, that is another thing. God knows they have much to digest!

The clergy I pass by; their profundity of erudition, and their liberality of sentiment; their total want of pride, and their detestation of hypocrisy, are so proverbially notorious as to

* A club of choice spirits
place them far, far above either my praise or censure.

I was going to mention a man of worth whom I have the honour to call friend, the laird of Craigdarroch; but I have spoken to the landlord of the King's arms inn here, to have, at the next county-meeting, a large ewe-milk cheese on the table, for the benefit of the Dumfries-shire whigs, to enable them to digest the duke of Queensberry's late political conduct.

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

No. 40.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Honoured Madam, Mauchline, 2d August, 1786.

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

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

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

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

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

Since I am in the way of transcribing, the following were the production of yesterday as I jogged through the wild hills of New Cumnock. I intended inserting them, or something like them, in an epistle I am going to write to the gentleman on whose friendship my excise hopes depend, Mr. Graham of Fintry; one of the

See vol. i. p. 218.
worthiest and most accomplished gentlemen, not only of this country, but I will dare to say it, of this age. The following are just the first crude thoughts, "unhousell'd, unanointed, unanneall'd!"

[Here follows a few lines of his first Poetical Epistle to Mr. Graham, beginning, "Pity the tuneful muses' hapless train!"]

and ending, "God's image rudely etch'd on base alloy!" See the Epistle entire, vol. ii. p. 65.]

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

No. 41.

TO THE SAME.

My honoured Friend, Mauchline, 10th Aug. 1788.

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

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

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

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

I like your way in your church-yard lucubrations. Thoughts that are the spontaneous result of accidental situations, either respecting health, place, or company, have often a strength, and always an originality, that would in vain be looked for in fancied circumstances and studied paragraphs. For me, I have often thought of keeping a letter, in progression, by me, to send you when the sheet was written out. Now I talk of sheets, I must tell you—my reason for writing to you on paper of this kind, is my pruriency of writing to you at large. A page of post is on such a dissocial, narrow-minded scale, that I cannot abide it; and double letters, at least in my miscellaneous reveriemanner, are a monstrous tax in a close correspondence.
No. 42.

TO THE SAME.

Ellisland, 16th August, 1788.

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

Why droops my heart with fancied woes forlorn?
Why sinks my soul beneath each wint'ry sky?

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

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

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

Raving winds around her blowing.*

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

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

If I thought you had never seen it, I would

See vol. ii. p. 162.
transcribe for you a stanza of an old Scottish ballad, called *The Life and Age of Man*, beginning thus:

*Twas in the sixteenth hunder year  
Of God and fifty three,  
Frae Christ was born, that bought us dear,  
As writings testify.

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

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

What truth on earth so precious as the lie.

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

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

No. 43.

TO R. GRAHAM, OF FINTRY, ESQ.

Sir,

When I had the honour of being introduced to you at Athole-house, I did not think so soon of asking a favour of you. When Lear, in Shakespeare, asks old Kent, why he wished to be in his service, he answers, "Because you have that in your face which I could like to call master." For some such reason, Sir, do I now solicit your patronage. You know, I dare say, of an application I lately made to your Board to be admitted an officer of excise. I have, according to form, been examined by a supervisor, and to-day I gave in his certificate, with a request for an order for instructions. In this affair, if I succeed, I am afraid I shall but too much need a patronizing friend. Propriety of conduct as a man, and fidelity and attention as
an officer, I dare engage for; but with any
ting like business, except manual labour, I am
totally unacquainted.

I had intended to have closed my late appear-
ance on the stage of life in the character of a
country farmer; but after discharging some
filial and fraternal claims, I find I could only
fight for existence in that miserable manner
which I have lived to see throw a venerable parent
into the jaws of a jail; whence death, the poor
man's last and often best friend, rescued him.

I know, Sir, that to need your goodness is to
have a claim on it. May I therefore beg your
patronage to forward me in this affair till I be
appointed to a division, where, by the help of
rigid economy, I will try to support that inde-
pendence so dear to my soul, but which has
been too often so distant from my situation.

[Here follows the Author's first Poetical Epistle to Mr. Graham,
of Fintry. See vol. ii. p. 65.]

No. 44.

TO MR. PETER HILL.

Mauchline, 1st October, 1788.

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

To sooth the madding passions all to peace.  
Address.

To sooth the throbbing passions into peace.  
Thomson.

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

\[ \text{Truth,} \\
\text{The soul of every song that's nobly great.} \]

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

Great mass of waters, theme for nobler song,
is perhaps no emendation. His enumeration of a comparison with other lakes, is at once harmonious and poetic. Every reader's ideas must sweep the

Winding margin of an hundred miles.

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

The gloom
Deep seamed with frequent streaks of moving fire.

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

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

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

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

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

**No. 45.**

**TO MRS. DUNLOP.**

Mauchline, 13th November, 1788.

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

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

* Heifer.
No. 46.

TO ****.

Sir, November 8, 1758.

Notwithstanding the opprobrious epithets with which some of our philosophers and gloomy sectaries have branded our nature—the principle of universal selfishness, the proneness to all evil, they have given us—still, the detestation in which inhumanity to the distressed, and insolence to the fallen, are held by all mankind, shews that they are not natives to the human heart. Even the unhappy partner of our kind who is undone—the bitter consequence of his follies or his crimes—who but sympathizes with the miseries of this ruined profligate brother? We forget the injuries, and feel for the man.

I went last Wednesday to my parish church, most cordially to join in grateful acknowledgments to the Author of all good, for the consequent blessings of the glorious revolution. To that auspicious event we owe no less than our liberties, civil and religious. To it we are likewise indebted for the present Royal Family, the ruling features of whose administration have ever been mildness to the subject, and tenderness of his rights.
Bred and educated in revolution principles (the principles of reason and common sense), it could not be any silly political prejudice which made my heart revolt at the harsh, abusive manner, in which the reverend gentleman mentioned the House of Stuart, and which, I am afraid, was too much the language of the day. We may rejoice sufficiently in our deliverance from past evils, without cruelly raking up the ashes of those whose misfortune it was, perhaps as much as their crime, to be the authors of those evils; and we may bless God for all his goodness to us as a nation, without, at the same time, cursing a few ruined, powerless exiles, who only harboured ideas, and made attempts that most of us would have done, had we been in their situation.

"The bloody and tyrannical House of Stuart," may be said with propriety and justice, when compared with the present Royal Family, and the sentiments of our days; but is there no allowance to be made for the manners of the times? Were the royal contemporaries of the Stuarts more attentive to their subjects' rights? Might not the epithets of "bloody and tyrannical" be, with at least equal justice, applied to the House of Tudor, of York, or any other of their predecessors?

The simple state of the case, Sir, seems to be this: At that period, the science of government, the knowledge of the true relation between king and subject, was, like other sciences and
other knowledge, just in its infancy, emerging from dark ages of ignorance and barbarity.

The Stuarts only contended for prerogatives which they knew their predecessors enjoyed, and which they saw their contemporaries enjoying; but these prerogatives were inimical to the happiness of the nation, and the rights of subjects.

In this contest between prince and people, the consequence of that light of science which had lately dawned over Europe, the monarch of France, for example, was victorious over the struggling liberties of his people. With us, luckily the monarch failed; and his unwarrantable pretensions fell a sacrifice to our rights and happiness. Whether it was owing to the wisdom of leading individuals, or to the justling of parties, I cannot pretend to determine; but likewise, happily for us, the kingly power was shifted into another branch of the family, who, as they owed the throne solely to the call of a free people, could claim nothing inconsistent with the covenanted terms which placed them there.

The Stuarts have been condemned and laughed at for the folly and impracticability of their attempts in 1715 and 1745. That they failed, I bless God; but cannot join in the ridicule against them. Who does not know that the abilities or defects of leaders and commanders are often hidden until put to the touch-stone of exigency; and that there is a caprice of fortune,
an omnipotence in particular accidents and conjunctures of circumstances, which exalt us as heroes, or brand us as madmen, just as they are for or against us?

Man, Mr. Publisher, is a strange, weak, inconsistent being. Who would believe, Sir, that, in this our Augustan age of liberality and refinement, while we seem so justly sensible and jealous of our rights and liberties, and animated with such indignation against the very memory of those who would have subverted them—that a certain people, under our national protection, should complain, not against our monarch and a few favourite advisers, but against our whole legislative body, for similar oppression, and almost in the very same terms, as our forefathers did of the House of Stuart! I will not, I cannot enter into the merits of the cause; but I dare say the American Congress, in 1776, will be allowed to be as able and as enlightened as the English convention was in 1688; and that their posterity will celebrate the centenary of their deliverance from us, as duly and sincerely as we do ours from the oppressive measures of the wrong-headed House of Stuart.

To conclude, Sir, let every man who has a tear for the many miseries incident to humanity, feel for a family illustrious as any in Europe, and unfortunate beyond historic precedent; and let every Briton (and particularly every Scotsman), who ever looked with reverential pity on
the dotage of a parent, cast a veil over the fatal mistakes of the kings of his forefathers.*

No. 47.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

My dear Friend, Ellisland, 17th December, 1788.

Yours, dated Edinburgh, which I have just read, makes me very unhappy. Almost "blind and wholly deaf," are melancholy news of human-nature; but when told of a much loved and honoured friend, they carry misery in the sound. Goodness on your part, and gratitude on mine, began a tie, which has gradually and strongly entwisted itself among the dearest chords of my bosom; and I tremble at the omens of your late and present ailing habits and shattered health. You miscalculate matters widely, when you forbid my waiting on you, lest it should hurt my worldly concerns. My small scale of farming is exceedingly more simple and easy than what you have lately seen at Moreham Mains. But be that as it may, the heart of the man, and the fancy of the poet, are the two grand considerations for which I live.

* This letter was sent to the publisher of the London Evening Star.
If miry ridges, and dirty dunghills are to engross the best part of the functions of my soul immortal, I had better been a rook or a magpie at once, and then I should not have been plagued with any ideas superior to breaking of clods, and picking up grubs—not to mention barn-door cocks or mallards, creatures with which I could almost exchange lives at any time. If you continue so deaf, I am afraid a visit will be no great pleasure to either of us; but if I hear you are got so well again as to be able to relish conversation, look you to it, Madam, for I will make my threatenings good, I am to be at the new-year-day fair of Ayr, and by all that is sacred in the world, friend, I will come and see you.

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

[Here follows the song of Auld lang syne. See vol. iv. p. 85.]
Light be the turf on the breast of the heaven-inspired poet who composed this glorious fragment! There is more of the fire of native genius in it than in half a dozen of modern English bacchanalians. Now I am on my hobby horse, I cannot help inserting two other old stanzas *, which please me mightily.

Go fetch to me a pint o' wine,
An' fill it in a silver tassie;
That I may drink, before I go;
A service to my bonie lassie;
The boat rocks at the pier o' Leith;
Fu' loud the wind blows frae the ferry,
The ship rides by the Berwick-law,
And I maun lea'e my bonie Mary.

The trumpets sound, the banners fly,
The glittering spears are ranked ready:
The shouts o' war are heard afar,
The battle closes thick and bloody:
But it's not the roar o' sea or shore,
Wad mak me langer wish to tarry,
Nor shouts o' war that's heard afar,
It's leaving thee, my bonie Mary.

No. 48.

TO MISS DAVIES,

Who had heard he had been making a ballad on her, inclosing that ballad. See vol. ii. p. 222.

Madam,

I UNDERSTAND my very worthy neighbour, Mr. Riddel, has informed you that I have made

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

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

No. 49.

TO SIR JOHN WHITEFOORD.

Sir,

Mr. M’Kenzie, in Mauchline, my very warm and worthy friend, has informed me how much you are pleased to interest yourself in my fate as a man, and (what to me is incomparably dearer) my fame as a poet. I have, Sir, in one or two instances, been patronized by those of your character in life, when I was introduced to their notice by .......... friends to them, and honoured acquaintances to me; but you are the first gentleman in the country whose benevolence and goodness of heart has interested him
for me, unsolicited and unknown. I am not master enough of the etiquette of these matters to know, nor did I stay to enquire, whether formal duty bade, or cold propriety disallowed, my thanking you in this manner, as I am convinced, from the light in which you kindly view me, that you will do me the justice to believe this letter is not the manœuvre of a needy, sharpening author, fastening on those in upper life who honour him with a little notice of him or his works. Indeed the situation of poets is generally such, to a proverb, as may, in some measure, palliate that prostitution of heart and talents they have at times been guilty of. I do not think prodigality is by any means a necessary concomitant of a poetic turn, but believe a careless, indolent inattention to economy is almost inseparable from it. Then there must be in the heart of every bard of Nature's making a certain modest sensibility, mixed with a kind of pride, that will ever keep him out of the way of those windfalls of fortune, which frequently light on hardy impudence and foot-licking servility. It is not easy to imagine a more helpless state than his, whose poetic fancy unfits him for the world, and whose character as a scholar gives him some pretensions to the politesse of life—yet is as poor as I am

For my part, I thank Heaven, my star has been kinder. Learning never elevated my ideas above the peasant's shed; and I have an independent fortune at the plough-tail.
I was surprised to hear that any one, who pretended in the least to the manners of the gentleman, should be so foolish, or worse, as to stoop to traduce the morals of such a one as I am, and so inhumanly cruel, too, as to meddle with that late most unfortunate, unhappy part of my story. With a tear of gratitude, I thank you, Sir, for the warmth with which you interposed in behalf of my conduct. I am, I acknowledge, too frequently the sport of whim, caprice, and passion; but reverence to God, and integrity to my fellow-creatures I hope I shall ever reserve. I have no return, Sir, to make you for your goodness but one—a return which I am persuaded will not be unacceptable—the honest, warm wishes of a grateful heart for your happiness, and every one of that lovely flock who stand to you in a filial relation. If ever calumny aim the poisoned shaft at them, may friendship be by to ward the blow!

No. 50.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Ellisland, New-Year-Day Morning, 1789.

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

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

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

We know nothing, or next to nothing, of the substance or structure of our souls, so cannot account for those seeming caprices in them that one should be particularly pleased with this
thing or struck with that, which, on minds of a different cast, makes no extraordinary impression. I have some favourite flowers in spring, among which are the mountain daisy, the harebell, the fox-glove, the wild-brier rose, the budding birch, and the hoary hawthorn, that I view and hang over with particular delight. I never heard the loud, solitary whistle of the curlew, in a summer noon, or the wild mixing cadence of a troop of grey plover, in an autumnal morning, without feeling an elevation of soul like the enthusiasm of devotion or poetry. Tell me, my dear friend, to what can this be owing? Are we a piece of machinery, which, like the Æolian harp, passive, takes the impression of the passing accident? Or, do these workings argue something within us above the trodden clod? I own myself partial to such proofs of those awful and important realities—a God that made all things—man's immaterial and immortal nature—and a world of weal or woe beyond death and the grave.
No. 51.

TO DR. MOORE.

Sir, 

Ellisland, near Dumfries, 4th Jan. 1789.

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

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

I believe I shall, in whole £100 copy-right
included, clear about £400 some little odds;
and even part of this depends upon what the
gentleman has yet to settle with me. I give you
this information, because you did me the honour
to interest yourself much in my welfare.

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

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

No. 52.

TO BISHOP GEDDES:

Venerable Father, Ellisland, 3d February, 1789.

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

In that first concern, the conduct of the man, there was ever but one side on which I was habitually blameable, and there I have secured myself in the way pointed out by Nature and Nature's God. I was sensible that, to so helpless a creature as a poor poet, a wife and family were incumbrances which a species of prudence would bid him shun; but when the alternative
was, being at eternal warfare with myself on account of habitual follies, to give them no worse name, which no general example, no licentious wit, no sophistical infidelity would, to me, ever justify; I must have been a fool to have hesitated, and a madman to have made another choice.

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

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

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

That acquaintance, worthy Sir, with which you were pleased to honour me, you must still allow me to challenge; for with whatever unconcern I give up my transient connexion with the merely great, I cannot lose the patronizing notice of the learned and the good without the bitterest regret.

No. 53.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Ellisland, 4th March, 1789.

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

Vain pomp and glory of this world, I hate you.

When I must skulk into a corner, lest the rattling equipage of some gaping blockhead should mangle me in the mire, I am tempted to exclaim—“What merit has he had, or what “demerit have I had, in some state of pre-
"existence, that he is ushered into this state of "being with the sceptre of rule and the key of "riches in his puny fist, and I am kicked into "the world, the sport of folly, or the victim of "pride?" I have read somewhere of a monarch (in Spain I think it was) who was so out of humour with the Ptolemean system of astronomy, that he said, had he been of the Creator's council he could have saved him a great deal of labour and absurdity. I will not defend this blasphemous speech; but often, as I have glided with humble stealth through the pomp of Prince's Street, it has suggested itself to me, as an improvement on the present human figure, that a man, in proportion to his own conceit of his consequence in the world, could have pushed out the longitude of his common size, as a snail pushes out his horns, or as we draw out a perspective. This trifling alteration, not to mention the prodigious saving it would be in the tear and wear of the neck and limb-sinews of many of his Majesty's liege subjects in the way of tossing the head and tiptoe-strutting, would evidently turn out a vast advantage, in enabling us at once to adjust the ceremonials in making a bow, or making way to a great man, and that too within a second of the precise spherical angle of reverence, or an inch of the particular point of respectful distance, which the important creature itself requires; as a measuring-glance at its towering altitude would determine the affair like instinct.
You are right, Madam, in your idea of poor Mylne's poem, which he has addressed to me. The piece has a good deal of merit, but it has one great fault—it is by far too long. Besides, my success has encouraged such a shoal of ill-spawned monsters to crawl into public notice, under the title of Scottish poets, that the very term Scottish Poetry borders on the burlesque. When I write to Mr. Carfrae I shall advise him rather to try one of his deceased friend's English pieces. I am prodigiously hurried with my own matters, else I would have requested a perusal of all Mylne's poetic performances; and would have offered his friends my assistance in either selecting or correcting what would be proper for the press. What it is that occupies me so much, and perhaps a little oppresses my present spirits, shall fill up a paragraph in some future letter.

No. 54.

TO THE REV. P. CARFRAE.

Reverend Sir,

I do not recollect that I have ever felt a severer pang of shame, than on looking at the date of your obliging letter which accompanied Mr. Mylne's poem.
I am much to blame. The honour Mr. Mylne has done me, greatly enhanced in its value by the endearing, though melancholy circumstance of its being the last production of his muse, deserved a better return.

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

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

No. 55.

TO DR. MOORE.

Sir, 

Ellisland, 23d March, 1789.

The gentleman who will deliver you this is a Mr. Nielson, a worthy clergyman in my neighbourhood, and a very particular acquaintance of mine. As I have troubled him with this packet, I must turn him over to your goodness to recompence him for it in a way in which he much needs your assistance, and where you can effectually serve him. Mr. Nielson is on his way for France, to wait on his Grace of Queensberry, on some little business of a good deal of
importance to him; and he wishes for your instructions respecting the most eligible mode of travelling, &c. for him, when he has crossed the Channel. I should not have dared to take this liberty with you, but that I am told, by those who have the honour of your personal acquaintance, that to be a poor honest Scotchman is a letter of recommendation to you, and that to have it in your power to serve such a character gives you much pleasure.

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

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

No. 56.

TO MR. HILL.

Ellisland, 2d April, 1789.

I will make no excuses, my dear bibliopolus, (God forgive me for murdering language!) that I have sat down to write you on this vile paper.

It is economy, Sir; it is that cardinal virtue, prudence; so I beg you will sit down, and either compose or borrow a panegyric. If you are going to borrow, apply to

to compose, or rather to compound, something

* The ode enclosed is that printed in vol. ii. p. 120.
very clever on my remarkable frugality; that I write to one of my most esteemed friends on this wretched paper, which was originally intended for the venal fist of some drunken exiseman, to take dirty notes in a miserable vault of an ale-cellar.

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

But to descend from heroics,

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

The library scheme that I mentioned to you is already begun, under the direction of Captain Riddel. There is another in emulation of it going on at Closeburn, under the auspices of Mr. Monteith, of Closeburn, which will be on a greater scale than ours. Capt. Riddel gave his infant society a great many of his old books;
else I had written you on that subject; but, one of these days, I shall trouble you with a commission for "The Monkland Friendly Society" —a copy of *The Spectator, Mirror, and Lounger, Man of Feeling, Man of the World, Guthrie’s Geographical Grammar*, with some religious pieces, will likely to be our first order. When I grow richer, I will write to you on gilt post to make amends for this sheet. At present, every guinea has a five guinea errand with

My dear Sir, your faithful, poor, but honest friend,

R. B.

No. 57.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Ellisland, 2d April, 1789.

I no sooner hit on any poetic plan or fancy, but I wish to send it to you; and if knowing and reading these give half the pleasure to you, that communicating them to you gives to me, I am satisfied.

I have a poetic whim in my head, which I at present dedicate, or rather inscribe, to the right hon. Charles James Fox; but how long that
fancy may hold, I cannot say. A few of the first lines I have just rough-sketchéd as fol-

ows:—

**SKETCH.**

How wisdom and folly meet, mix and unite;
How virtue and vice blend their black and their white;
How genius, th' illustrious father of fiction,
Confounds rule and law, reconciles contradiction—
I sing: If these mortals, the critics, should bustle,
I care not, not I, let the critics go whistle.

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

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

Good Lord, what is man! for as simple he looks,
Do but try to develope his hooks and his crooks;
With his depths and his shallows, his good and his evil,
All in all he's a problem must puzzle the devil.

On his one ruling passion Sir Pope hugely labours,
That, like the old Hebrew walking-switch, eats up its neighbours:
Mankind are his show-box—a friend, would you know him?
Pull the string, ruling passion, the picture will shew him.
What pity, in rearing so beauteous a system,
One trifling particular, truth, should have miss'd him;
For, spite of his fine theoretic positions,
Mankind is a science defies definitions.

Some sort all our qualities each to its tribe;
And think human nature they truly describe;
Have you found this, or t'other? there's more in the wind,
As by one drunken fellow his comrades you'll
But such is the flaw, or the depth of the plan,
In the make of that wonderful creature call'd Man,
No two virtues, whatever relation they claim,
Nor even two different shades of the same,
Though like as was ever twin brother to brother,
Possessing the one shall imply you've the other.

On the 20th current I hope to have the honour
of assuring you, in person, how sincerely I am,

No. 58.

TO MR. CUNNINGHAM.

My dear Sir,

Ellisland, 4th May, 1789.

Your duty free favour, of the 26th April, I
received two days ago. I will not say I perused
it with pleasure; that is the cold compliment
of ceremony; I perused it, Sir, with delicious
satisfaction. In short, it is such a letter, that
not you, nor your friend, but the legislature,
by express proviso in their postage laws, should
frank. A letter, informed with the soul of friend-
ship, is such an honour to human nature, that
they should order it free ingress and egress to
and from their bags and mails, as an encourage-
ment and mark of distinction to super-eminent
virtue.

I have just put the last hand to a little poem *
which I think will be something to your taste.

See vol. i. p. 178.
One morning lately as, I was out pretty early in the fields sowing some grass seeds, I heard the burst of a shot from a neighbouring plantation, and presently a poor little wounded hare came crippling by me. You will guess my indignation at the inhuman fellow who could shoot a hare at this season, when they all of them have young ones. Indeed there is something in that business of destroying, for our sport, individuals in the animal creation that do not injure us materially, which I could never reconcile to my ideas of virtue.

C—— is a glorious production of the author of man. You, he, and the noble colonel of the
C—— F—— are to me.

Dear as the ruddy drops which warm my breast.

I have a good mind to make verses on you all, to the tune of Three good fellows ayont the glen.

No. 59.

TO MR. M‘AULEY, OF DUMBARTON.

Dear Sir,

Though I am not without my fears respecting my fate at that grand universal inquest of right and wrong, commonly called The Last Day, yet I trust there is one sin, which that arch-vagabond, Satan, who, I understand, is to be
king's evidence, cannot throw in my teeth—I mean ingratitude. There is a certain pretty large quantum of kindness for which I remain, and from inability, I fear, must remain your debtor; but though unable to repay the debt, I assure you, Sir, I shall ever warmly remember the obligation. It gives me the sincerest pleasure to hear, by my old acquaintance, Mr. Kennedy, that you are, in immortal Allan's language, "Hale and weel, and living;" and that your charming family are well, and promising to be an amiable and respectable addition to the company of performers, whom the great Manager of the drama of Man is bringing into action for the succeeding age.

With respect to my welfare, a subject in which you once warmly and effectively interested yourself, I am here in my old way, holding my plough, marking the growth of my corn or the health of my dairy; and at times sauntering by the delightful windings of the Nith, on the margin of which I have built my humble domicile, praying for seasonable weather, or holding an intrigue with the Muses; the only gipseys with whom I have now any intercourse. As I am entered into the holy state of matrimony, I trust my face is turned completely Zion-ward; and as it is a rule with all honest fellows to repeat no grievances, I hope that the little poetic licences of former days, will of course fall under the oblivious influence of some good-natured
statute of celestial proscription. In my family devotion, which, like a good presbyterian, I occasionally give to my household folks, I am extremely fond of the psalm, "Let not the errors of my youth," &c., and that other, "Lo, children are God's heritage," &c., in which last Mrs. Burns, who, by the bye, has a glorious "wood-note wild" at either old song or psalmody, joins me with the pathos of Handel's Messiah.

No. 60.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Dear Madam,

Ellisland, 21st June, 1789.

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

Monday Evening.

I have just heard ..... give a sermon. He is a man famous for his benevolence, and I revere him; but from such ideas of my Creator, good Lord deliver me! Religion, my honoured
friend, is surely a simple business, as it equally concerns the ignorant and the learned, the poor and the rich. That there is an incomprehensibly great Being, to whom I owe my existence, and that he must be intimately acquainted with the operations and progress of the internal machinery, and consequent outward deportment of this creature which he has made; these are, I think, self-evident propositions. That there is a real and eternal distinction between virtue and vice, and consequently that I am an accountable creature; that, from the seeming nature of the human mind, as well as from the evident imperfection, nay, positive injustice, in the administration of affairs, both in the natural and moral worlds, there must be a retributive scene of existence beyond the grave; must, I think, be allowed by every one who will give himself a moment's reflection. I will go farther, and affirm, that, from the sublimity, excellence, and purity of his doctrine and precepts, unparalleled by all the aggregated wisdom and learning of many preceding ages, though, to appearance, he himself was the obscurest and most illiterate of our species; therefore Jesus Christ was from God.

Whatever mitigates the woes, or increases the happiness of others, this is my criterion of goodness; and whatever injures society at large, or any individual in it, this is my measure of iniquity.
What think you, Madam, of my creed? I trust that I have said nothing that will lessen me in the eye of one whose good opinion I value almost next to the approbation of my own mind.

No. 61.

TO MR. * * * * * * *

My dear Sir,

The hurry of a farmer in this particular season, and the indolence of a poet at all times and seasons, will, I hope, plead my excuse for neglecting so long to answer your obliging letter of the fifth of August.

That you have done well in quitting your laborious concern in .... I do not doubt. The weighty reasons you mention were, I hope, very, and deservedly indeed, weighty ones, and your health is a matter of the last importance; but whether the remaining proprietors of the paper have also done well, is what I much doubt. The ...., so far as I was a reader, exhibited such a brilliancy of point, such an elegance of paragraph, and such a variety of intelligence, that I can hardly conceive it possible to continue a daily paper in the same degree of excellence; but if there was a man who had abilities equal to the task, that man's assistance the proprietors have lost.

........................................
When I received your letter I was transcribing for ..., my letter to the magistrates of the Canongate, Edinburgh, begging their permission to place a tomb-stone over poor Fergusson, and their edict in consequence of my petition; but now I shall send them to.... Poor Fergusson! If there be a life beyond the grave, which I trust there is; and if there be a good God presiding over all nature, which I am sure there is; thou art now enjoying existence in a glorious world, where worth of the heart alone is distinction in the man; where riches, deprived of all their pleasure-purchasing powers, return to their native sordid matter; where titles and honours are the disregarded reveries of an idle dream; and where that heavy virtue, which is the negative consequence of steady dullness, and those thoughtless, though often destructive follies, which are the unavoidable aberrations of frail human nature, will be thrown into equal oblivion as if they had never been!

Adieu, my dear Sir! so soon as your present views and schemes are concentrated in an aim, I shall be glad to hear from you, as your welfare and happiness is by no means a subject indifferent to

Yours, &c.
Dear Madam,

Ellisland, 6th September, 1789.

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

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

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

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

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

Against the day of battle and of war.

spoken of religion.

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

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

Farewell!—A Dieu, le bon Dieu, je vous commende!
BURNS'S LETTERS.

No. 63.

TO R. GRAHAM, OF FINTRY, ESQ.

Sir, 9th December, 1789.

I have a good while had a wish to trouble you with a letter, and had certainly done it long ere now, but for a humiliating something that throws cold water on the resolution, as if one should say, "You have found Mr. Graham a very powerful and kind friend indeed, and that interest he is so kindly taking in your concerns, you ought by every thing in your power to keep alive and cherish." Now though, since God has thought proper to make one powerful and another helpless, the connexion of obliger and obliged is all fair; and though my being under your patronage is to me highly honourable, yet, Sir, allow me to flatter myself, that, as a poet and an honest man, you first interested yourself in my welfare, and principally as such still, you permit me to approach you.

I have found the excise business go on a great deal smoother with me than I expected; owing a good deal to the generous friendship of Mr. Mitchell, my collector, and the kind assistance
of Mr. Findlater, my supervisor. I dare to be honest, and I fear no labour; nor do I find my hurried life greatly inimical to my correspondence with the muses. Their visits to me, indeed, and I believe to most of their acquaintance, like the visits of good angels, are short and far between; but I meet them now and then as I jog through the hills of Nithsdale, just as I used to do on the banks of Ayr. I take the liberty to enclose you a few bagatelles, all of them the productions of my leisure thoughts in my excise rides.

If you know or have ever seen Captain Grose, the antiquarian, you will enter into any humour that is in the verses on him *. Perhaps you have seen them before, as I sent them to a London newspaper. Though I dare say you have none of the solemn-league-and-covenant fire, which shone so conspicuously in Lord George Gordon and the Kilmarnock weavers, yet I think you must have heard of Dr. M'Gill, one of the clergymen of Ayr, and his heretical book. God help him poor man! Though he is one of the worthiest, as well as one of the ablest of the whole priesthood of the Kirk of Scotland, in every sense of that ambiguous term, yet the poor Doctor and his numerous family are in imminent danger of being thrown out to the mercy of the winter-winds. The inclosed ballad† on that business is, I confess, too local; but I

* See vol. i. p. 266.  † See vol. ii. p. 106.
laughed myself at some conceits in it, though I am convinced in my conscience that there are a good many heavy stanzas in it too.

I am too little a man to have any political attachments. I am deeply indebted to, and have the warmest veneration for individuals of both parties; but a man who has it in his power to be the father of a country, and who is a character that one cannot speak of with patience.

Sir J. J. does "what man can do," but yet I doubt his fate.

No. 64.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Ellisland, 13th December, 1789.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Rumour told me something of a son of yours who was returned from the East or West Indies. If you have gotten news of James or Anthony, it was cruel in you not to let me know. I promise you, on the sincerity of a man who is weary of one world and anxious about another, that scarce any thing could give me so much pleasure as to hear of any good thing befalling my honoured friend.

If you have a minute’s leisure, take up your pen in pity to le pauvre miserable. R. B.
No. 65.

TO SIR JOHN SINCLAIR.

Sir,

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

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

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

At the breaking up of this little society, which was formed under Mr. Riddel's patronage, what with benefactions of books from him, and what with their own purchases, they had collected together upwards of one hundred and fifty volumes. It will easily be guessed that a good deal of trash would be bought. Among the books, however, of this little library were, *Blair's Sermons, Robertson's History of Scotland, Hume's History of the Stuarts, the Spectator, Idler, Adventurer, Mirror, Observer, Man of Feeling, Man of the World, Chrysal, Don Quixote, Joseph Andrews, &c.* A peasant, who can read and enjoy such books, is certainly a much superior being to his neighbour, who perhaps stalks beside his team, very little removed, except in shape, from the brute he drives.

Wishing your patriotic exertions their so much merited success,

I am, Sir, your humble servant,

A Peasant.
No. 66.

TO MR. GILBERT BURNS.

Dear Brother, Ellisland, 11th January, 1790.

I mean to take advantage of the frank, though I have not in my present frame of mind much appetite for exertion in writing. My nerves are in a .... state. I feel that horrid hypochondria pervading every atom of both body and soul. This farm has undone my enjoyment of myself. It is a ruinous affair on all hands. But let it go to hell. I'll fight it out and be off with it.

We have gotten a set of very decent players here just now. I have seen them an evening or two. David Campbell, in Ayr, wrote to me by the manager of the company, a Mr. Sutherland, who is a man of apparent worth. On New-year-day evening I gave him the following prologue, which he spouted to his audience with applause.

No song nor dance I bring from yon great city
That queens it o'er our taste—the more's the pity:
Tho', by the bye, abroad why will you roam?
Good sense and taste are natives here at home;
But not for panegyrical I appear,
I come to wish you all a good new year!
Old father Time deputes me here before ye,
Not for to preach, but tell his simple story:
The sage grave ancient cough'd, and bade me say,
You're one year older this important day,
If wiser too—he hinted some suggestion,
But 'twould be rude, you know, to ask the question;
And with a would-be-roughish leer and wink,
He bade me on you press this one word—Think!

Ye sprightly youths, quite flush with hope and spirit,
Who think to storm the world by dint of merit,
To you the dotard has a deal to say,
In his sly, dry, sententious, proverb way!
He bids you mind, amid your thoughtless rattle,
That the first blow is ever half the battle;
That tho' some by the skirt may try to snatch him,
Yet by the forehead is the hold to catch him,
That whether doing, suffering, or forbearing,
You may do miracles by persevering.

Last, tho' not least in love, ye youthful fair,
Angelic forms, high Heaven's peculiar care!
To you old bald-pate smooths his wrinkled brow,
And humbly begs you'll mind the important—Now!
To crown your happiness, he asks your leave,
And offers, bliss to give and to receive.

For our sincere, tho' haply weak endeavours,
With grateful pride we own your many favours,
And howso' er our tongues may ill reveal it,
Believe our glowing bosoms truly feel it.

I can no more. If once I was clear of this
... farm, I should respire more at ease.
No. 67.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Ellisland, 25th January, 1790.

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

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

Most sincerely do I rejoice with you, dear Madam, in the good news of Anthony. Not only your anxiety about his fate, but my own esteem for such a noble, warm-hearted, manly young fellow, in the little I had of his acquaintance, has interested me deeply in his fortunes.
Falconer, the unfortunate author of the *Shipwreck*, which you so much admire, is no more. After weathering the dreadful catastrophe he so feelingly describes in his poem, and after weathering many hard gales of fortune, he went to the bottom with the Aurora frigate. I forget what part of Scotland had the honour of giving him birth, but he was the son of obscurity and misfortune*. He was one of those daring adventurous spirits which Scotland, beyond any other country, is remarkable for producing. Little does the fond mother think, as she hangs delighted over the sweet little leech at her bosom, where the poor fellow may hereafter wander, and what may be his fate. I remember a stanza in an old Scottish

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* He was born at Edinburgh about the year 1730. His parents, after suffering many hardships, both died of an epidemic fever, leaving him, at an early age, forlorn and destitute. He was compelled, against his inclination, to embrace a sea-faring life; and was bound an apprentice to a trading vessel at Leith, in which he had an opportunity of seeing a multitude of foreign parts. Before he was eighteen he was engaged at Alexandria as second mate of a large merchant ship in the Levant trade. About three years after he displayed his poetical abilities in a small poem printed in Edinburgh; and in 1762, he went to London, where he published the Shipwreck. The success of this piece drew him from his obscurity; and being patronized by the duke of York, he was rated as a midshipman on board the Royal George. In 1763, he was appointed purser to the Glory frigate; And in 1679, he occupied the same station in the Aurora. This vessel, destined to India, touched at the Cape of Good Hope on her passage out; and left it on the 21st of December in the same year; but whether she foundered or was burnt at sea has not been ascertained. She has never since been heard of.
ballad, which, notwithstanding its rude simplicity, speaks feelingly to the heart:

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

Old Scottish songs are, you know, a favourite study and pursuit of mine; and now I am on that subject, allow me to give you two stanzas of another old simple ballad, which I am sure will please you. The catastrophe of the piece is a poor ruined female, lamenting her fate. She concludes with this pathetic wish:

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

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

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

I am every day expecting the doctor to give your little god-son * the small-pox. They are rise in the country, and I tremble for his fate. By the way, I cannot help congratulating you

* The author's second son, Francis.
on his looks and spirit. Every person who sees him, acknowledges him to be the finest, handsomest child he has ever seen. I am myself delighted with the manly swell of his little chest, and a certain miniature dignity in the carriage of his head, and glance of his fine black eye, which promise the undaunted gallantry of an independent mind.

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

No. 68.

TO MR. CUNNINGHAM.

Ellisland, 13th February, 1790.

I beg your pardon, my dear and much valued friend, for writing to you on this very unfashionable, unsightly sheet—

My poverty but not my will consents.

But to make amends. Since of modish post I have none, except one poor widowed half sheet of gilt, which lies in my drawer among my plebeian foolscap pages, like the widow of a man of fashion, whom that unpolite scoundrel, Necessity, has driven from Burgundy and Pineapple, to a dish of Bohca, with the scandal-
bearing help-mate of a village priest; or a glass of whisky-toddy, with the ruby-nosed yoke-fellow of a foot-padding exciseman—I make a vow to inclose this sheet-full of epistolary fragments in that my only scrap of gilt-paper.

I am indeed your unworthy debtor for three friendly letters. I ought to have written to you long ere now, but it is a literal fact, I have scarcely a spare moment. It is not that I will not write to you; Miss Burnet is not more dear to her guardian angel, nor his grace the Duke of ........... to the powers of ........... than my friend Cunningham to me. It is not that I cannot write to you; should you doubt it, take the following fragment which was intended for you some time ago, and be convinced that I can antithesize sentiment and circumvolute periods as well as any coiner of phrase in the regions of philology.

My dear Cunningham, December, 1789.

WHERE are you? And what are you doing? Can you be that son of levity, who takes up a friendship as he takes up a fashion; or are you, like some other of the wortbiest fellows in the world, the victim of indolence, laden with fetters of ever-increasing weight?

What strange beings we are! Since we have a portion of conscious existence, equally capable of enjoying pleasure, happiness and rapture, or of suffering pain, wretchedness and misery, it it surely worthy of an inquiry, whether there
be not such a thing as a science of life; whether method, economy, and fertility of expedients be not applicable to enjoyment; and whether there be not a want of dexterity in pleasure which renders our little scantling of happiness still less; and a profuseness, an intoxication in bliss which leads to satiety, disgust, and self-abhorrence?

There is not a doubt but that health, talents, character, decent competency, respectable friends, are real substantial blessings; and yet do we not daily see those who enjoy many or all of these good things, contrive, notwithstanding, to be as unhappy as others to whose lot few of them have fallen? I believe one great source of this mistake or misconduct is owing to a certain stimulus, with us called ambition, which goads us up the hill of life, not as we ascend other eminences, for the laudable curiosity of viewing an extended landscape, but rather from the dishonest pride of looking down on others of our fellow-creatures, seemingly diminutive, in humble stations, &c. &c.

Sunday, 14th February, 1790.

God help me! I am now obliged to join

Night to day, and Sunday to the week.

If there be any truth in the orthodox faith of these churches, I am damned past redemption, and what is worse, damned to all eternity. I am deeply read in *Boston's Fourfold State*, Mar-

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shall on Sanctification, Guthrie’s Trial of a Saving Interest, &c.; but “there is no balm in Gilead, there is no physician there” for me; so I shall e’en turn Arminian, and trust to “sincere, though imperfect obedience.”

Tuesday, 16th.

Luckily for me I was prevented from the discussion of the knotty point at which I had just made a full stop. All my fears and cares are of this world. If there is another, an honest man has nothing to fear from it. I hate a man that wishes to be a deist; but I fear every fair, unprejudiced inquirer must in some degree be a sceptic. It is not that there are any very staggering arguments against the immortality of man; but, like electricity, phlogiston, &c., the subject is so involved in darkness, that we want data to go upon. One thing frightens me much—That we are to live for ever seems too good news to be true. That we are to enter into a new scene of existence, where, exempt from want and pain, we shall enjoy ourselves and our friends, without satiety or separation; how much should I be indebted to any one who could fully assure me that this was certain!

My time is once more expired. I will write to Mr. Cleghorn soon. God bless him and all his concerns! And may all the powers that preside over conviviality and friendship, be present
with all their kindest influence, when the bearer of this, Mr. Syme, and you meet! I wish I could also make one. I think we should be ......

Finally, brethren, farewell! Whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are gentle, whatsoever things are charitable, whatsoever things are kind, think on these things, and think on

ROBERT BURNS.

No. 69.

TO MR. HILL.

Ellisland, 2d March, 1790.

At a late meeting of the Monkland Friendly Society, it was resolved to augment their library by the following books, which you are to send us as soon as possible: The Mirror, The Lounger, Man of Feeling, Man of the World, (these, for my own sake, I wish to have by the first carrier), Knox's History of the Reformation, Rae's History of the Rebellion in 1715, any good History of the Rebellion in 1745, A Display of the Secession Act and Testimony, by Mr. Gibb, Hervey's Meditations, Beveridge's Thoughts, and another copy of Watson's Body of Divinity.

I wrote to Mr. A. Masterton three or four months ago, to pay some money he owed me into your hands, and, lately, I wrote you to the same purpose, but I have heard from neither one nor other of you.
In addition to the books I commissioned in my last, I want very much, *An Index to the Excise Laws, or an Abridgement of all the Statutes now in force relative to the Excise*, by Jellinger Symons. I want three copies of this book. If it is now to be had, cheap or dear, get it for me. An honest country neighbour of mine wants, too, *A Family Bible*, the larger the better, but second-hand, for he does not chuse to give above ten shillings for the book. I want likewise, for myself, as you can pick them up, second-hand or cheap, copies of Otway's *Dramatic Works*, Ben Johnson's, Dryden's, Congreve's, Wycherley's, Vanbrugh's Cibber's, or any Dramatic Works of the more modern, Macklin, Garrick, Foote, Colman, or Sheridan. A good copy too of Moliere, in French, I much want. Any other good dramatic authors in that language I want also; but comic authors chiefly, though I should wish to have *Racine, Corneille*, and *Voltaire* too. I am in no hurry for all, or any of these, but if you accidentally meet with them very cheap, get them for me.

And now, to quit the dry walk of business, how do you do, my dear friend? and how is Mrs. Hill? I trust, if now and then not so *elegantly* handsome, at least as amiable, and sings as divinely as ever. My good wife, too, has a charming "wood-note wild." Now, could we four...........

I am out of all patience with this vile world, for one thing. Mankind are by nature benevo-
lent creatures. Except in a few scoundrelly instances, I do not think that avarice of the good things we chance to have is born with us; but we are placed here amid so much nakedness, and hunger, and poverty, and want, that we are under a cursed necessity of studying selfishness in order that we may exist. Still there are, in every age, a few souls, that all the wants and woes of life cannot debase to selfishness, or even to the necessary alloy of caution and prudence. If ever I am in danger of vanity, it is when I contemplate myself on this side of my disposition and character. God knows I am no saint. I have a whole host of follies and sins to answer for; but if I could, and I believe I do it as far as I can, I would wipe away all tears from all eyes. Adieu!

No. 70.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Ellisland, 10th April, 1790.

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

......States of native liberty possesst,
Tho' very poor, may yet be very blest.

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

Tell me, my friend, is this weak prejudice? I believe, in my conscience, such ideas, as, "my country; her independence; her honour; the illustrious names that mark the history of my native land," &c.—I believe these, among your men of the world—men who in fact guide, for the most part, and govern our world—are looked on as so many modifications of wrong-headedness. They know the use of bawling out such terms to rouse or lead the rabble; but for their own private use, with almost all the able statesmen that ever existed, or now exist, when they talk of right and wrong, they only mean proper and improper; and their measure of conduct is, not what they ought, but what they dare.

For the truth of this I shall not ransack the history of nations, but appeal to one of the ablest judges of men, and himself one of the ablest men that ever lived—the celebrated earl
of Chesterfield. In fact, a man who could thoroughly control his vices whenever they interfered with his interest, and who could completely put on the appearance of every virtue as often as it suited his purposes, is, on the Stanhopian plan, the *perfect man*—a man to lead nations.

But are great abilities, complete without a flaw, and polished without a blemish, the standard of human excellence? This is certainly the staunch opinion of *men of the world*; but I call on honour, virtue, and worth, to give the Stygian doctrine a loud negative. However, this must be allowed, that, if you abstract from man the idea of an existence beyond the grave, then, the true measure of human conduct is *proper* and *improper*. Virtue and vice, as dispositions of the heart, are, in that case, of scarcely the import and value to the world at large as harmony and discord in the modifications of sound; and a delicate sense of honour, like a nice ear for music, though it may sometimes give the possessor an ecstacy unknown to the coarser organs of the herd, yet, considering the harsh gratings and inharmonic jars in this ill-tuned state of being, it is odds but the individual would be as happy, and certainly would be as much respected by the true judges of society, as it would then stand, without either a good ear or a good heart.

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

Still, with all my admiration of M'Kenzie's writings, I do not know if they are the fittest reading for a young man who is about to set out, as the phrase is, to make his way into life. Do not you think, Madam, that among the few favoured of Heaven in the structure of their minds (for such there certainly are), there may be a purity, a tenderness, a dignity, an elegance of soul, which are of no use, nay, in some degree, absolutely disqualifying for the truly important business of making a man's way into life? If I am not much mistaken, my gallant young friend, A.,.,.,, is very much under
these disqualifications; and for the young females of a family I could mention, well may they excite parental solicitude; for I, a common acquaintance, or, as my vanity will have it, an humble friend, have often trembled for a turn of mind which may render them eminently happy or peculiarly miserable.

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

No. 71.

TO DR. MOORE.

Sir,

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

Coming into town this morning, to attend my duty in this office, it being collection-day, I met with a gentleman who tells me he is on his way to London; so I take the opportunity of writing to you, as franking is at present under a temporary death. I shall have some snatches of leisure through the day, amid our horrid business and bustle, and I shall improve them as well as I can; but let my letter be as stupid as ........................................, as miscellaneous as a newspaper, as short as a hungry grace before meat, or as long as a law-paper in the
Douglas' cause; as ill spelt as country John's billet-doux, or as unsightly a scrawl as Betty Byre-mucker's answer to it; I hope, considering circumstances, you will forgive it; and as it will put you to no expence of postage, I shall have the less reflection about it.

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

Though I shall hardly think of fairly writing out my "Comparative View," I shall certainly trouble you with my remarks such as they are.
I have just received from my gentleman that horrid summons in the book of Revelations—
"That time shall be no more!"

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

No. 72.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Dear Madam,

8th August, 1790.

After a long day's toil, plague, and care, I sit down to write to you. Ask me not why I have delayed it so long? It was owing to hurry, indolence, and fifty other things; in short, to any thing—but forgetfulness of la plus amiable de son sexe. By the bye, you are indebted your best courtesy to me for this last compliment, as I pay it from sincere conviction of its truth—a quality rather rare in compliments of these grinning, bowing, scraping times.
Well, I hope writing to you will ease a little my troubled soul. Sorely has it been bruised to-day! A ci-devant friend of mine, and an intimate acquaintance of yours, has given my feelings a wound that I perceive will gangrene dangerously ere it cure. He has wounded my pride.

No. 73.

TO MR. CUNNINGHAM.

Ellisland, 8th August, 1790.

Forgive me, my once dear, and ever dear friend, my seeming negligence. You cannot sit down, and fancy the busy life I lead.

I laid down my goose-feather to beat my brains for an apt simile, and had some thoughts of a country grannum at a family christening; a bride on the market-day before her marriage; a tavern-keeper at an election dinner, &c. &c.; but the resemblance that hits my fancy best is that blackguard miscreant, Satan, who roams about like a roaring lion, seeking, searching whom he may devour. However, tossed about as I am, if I chuse (and who would not chuse) to bind down with the crampets of attention, the brazen foundation of integrity, I may rear up the super-
structure of Independence, and from its daring turrets, bid defiance to the storms of fate. And is not this a "consummation devoutly to be wished?"

Thy spirit, Independence, let me share;
Lord of the lion-heart, and eagle-eye!
Thy steps I follow with my bosom bare,
Nor heed the storm that howls along the sky!

Are not these noble verses? They are the introduction of Smollet's Ode to Independence. If you have not seen the poem I will send it to you. How wretched is the man that hangs on by the favours of the great! To shrink from every dignity of man at the approach of a lordly piece of self-consequence, who, amid all his tinsel glitter, and stately hauteur, is but a creature formed as thou art—and perhaps not so well formed as thou art—came into the world a puling infant as thou didst, and must go out of it as all men must, a naked corse.

No. 74.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

November, 1790.

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

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

I read your letter. I literally jumped for joy. How could such a mercurial creature as a poet, lumpishly keep his seat on the receipt of the best news from his best friend. I seized my gilt-headed Wangee rod, an instrument indispensably necessary, in my left hand, in the moment of inspiration and rapture; and stride, stride, quick, and quicker, out skipped I among the broomy banks of Nith, to muse over my joy by retail. To keep within the bounds of prose was impossible. Mrs. Little's is a more elegant, but not a more sincere compliment to the sweet little fellow than I, extempore almost, poured out in the following verses.*

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

*See vol. i. p. 169.
I have a copy of *Tam o' Shanter* ready to send you by the first opportunity. It is too heavy to send by post.

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

No. 75.

TO MR. PETER HILL.

17th January, 1791.

Take these two guineas, and place them over against that damned account of yours, which has gagged my mouth these five or six months! I can as little write good things as apologies to the man I owe money to. O the supreme curse of making three guineas do the business of five! Not all the labours of Hercules; not all the Hebrews’ three centuries of Egyptian bondage were such an insuperable business, such an infernal task!

Poverty! thou half-sister of Death, thou cousin-german of hell, where shall I find force of execration equal to the amplitude of thy demerits? Oppressed by thee, the venerable ancient, grown hoary in the practice of every virtue, laden with years and wretchedness, implores a little, little aid to support his existence,
from a stony-hearted son of Mammon, whose sun of prosperity never knew a cloud; and is by him denied and insulted. Oppressed by thee, the man of sentiment, whose heart glows with independence and melts with sensibility, inly pines under the neglect, or writhes, in bitterness of soul, under the contumely of arrogant, unfeeling wealth. Oppressed by thee, the son of genius, whose ill-starred ambition plants him at the tables of the fashionable and polite, must see, in suffering silence, his remark neglected, and his person despised, while shallow greatness, in his idiotic attempts at wit, shall meet with countenance and applause.

Nor is it only the family of worth that have reason to complain of thee. The children of folly and vice, though, in common with thee, the offspring of evil, smart equally under thy rod. Owing to thee, the man of unfortunate disposition and neglected education, is condemned as a fool for his dissipation, despised and shunned as a needy wretch, when his follies, as usual, bring him to want; and when his unprincipled necessities drive him to dishonest practices, he is abhorred as a miscreant, and perishes by the justice of his country.

But far otherwise is the lot of the man of family and fortune. His early follies and extravagant are spirit and fire; his consequent wants are the embarrassments of an honest fellow; and when, to remedy the matter, he has gained a legal commission to plunder distant
provinces, or massacre peaceful nations, he returns, perhaps, laden with the spoils of rapine and murder; lives wicked and respected, and dies a villain and a lord.

Nay, worst of all. Alas for helpless woman! The needy prostitute, who has shivered at the corner of the street, waiting to earn the wages of carnal prostitution, is left neglected and insulted, ridden down by the chariot-wheels of the coroneted rip, hurrying on to the guilty assignation—she, who, without the same necessities to plead, riots nightly in the same guilty trade.

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

No. 76.

TO A. F. TYTLER, ESQ.

Sir,

Nothing less than the unfortunate accident I have met with could have prevented my grateful acknowledgments for your letter. His own favourite poem*, and that an essay in a walk of the muses entirely new to him, where, con-

* Tam o' Shanter.

P 3
sequently, his hopes and fears were on the most anxious alarm for his success in the attempt—to have that poem so much applauded by one of the first judges, was the most delicious vibration that ever thrilled along the heart-strings of a poor poet.

However, Providence, to keep up the proper proportion of evil with the good, which it seems is necessary in this sublunary state, thought proper to check my exultation by a very serious misfortune. A day or two after I received your letter, my horse came down with me and broke my right arm. As this is the first service my arm has done me since its disaster, I find myself unable to do more than just in general terms to thank you for this additional instance of your patronage and friendship.

As to the faults you detected in the piece, they are truly there. One of them, the hit at the lawyer and the priest, I shall cut out. As to the falling off in the catastrophe, for the reason you justly adduce, it cannot easily be remedied.

Your approbation, Sir, has given me such additional spirits to persevere in this species of poetic composition, that I am already revolving two or three stories in my fancy. If I can bring these floating ideas to bear any kind of embodied form, it will give me an additional opportunity of assuring you how much I have the honour to be, &c.
No. 77.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Ellisland, 7th February, 1791.

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

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

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

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

No. 78.

TO LADY W. M. CONSTABLE,

Acknowledging a Present of a Snuff-box, with a Picture of Mary, Queen of Scots, on the lid.

My Lady,

NOTHING less than the unlucky accident of having lately broken my right arm, could have prevented me, the moment I received your

* This Elegy will be found, in its finished state, vol. ii. p. 123.
ladyship's elegant present, by Mrs. Miller, from returning you my warmest and most grateful acknowledgments. I assure your ladyship I shall set it apart. The symbols of religion shall only be more sacred. In the moment of poetic composition, the box shall be my inspiring genius. When I would breathe the comprehensive wish of benevolence for the happiness of others, I shall recollect your ladyship. When I would interest my fancy in the distresses incident to humanity, I shall remember the unfortunate Mary.

No. 79.

TO MRS. GRAHAM, OF FINTRY.

Madam,

whether it is that the story of our Mary, Queen of Scots, has a peculiar effect on the feelings of a poet, or whether I have, in the enclosed ballad*, succeeded beyond my usual poetic success I know not; but it has pleased me beyond any effort of my muse for a good while past. On that account I enclose it particularly to you.

It is true, the purity of my motives may be suspected. I am already, deeply indebted to Mr. Graham's goodness; and what, in the usual ways

* See vol. i. p. 242.
of men, is of infinitely greater importance, Mr. Graham can do me service of the utmost importance in time to come.

I was born a poor dog; and however I may occasionally pick a better bone than I used to do, I know I must live and die poor. But I will indulge the flattering faith that my poetry will considerably outlive my poverty; and without any fustian affectation of spirit, I can promise and affirm, that it must be no ordinary craving of the latter that shall ever make me do anything injurious to the honest fame of the former. Whatever may be my failings, for failings are a part of human nature, may they ever be those of a generous heart and an independent mind!

It is no fault of mine that I was born to dependence; nor is it Mr. Graham’s chiefest praise that he can command influence; but it is his merit to bestow, not only with the kindness of a brother, but with the politeness of a gentleman; and I trust it shall be mine, to receive with thankfulness and remember with undiminished gratitude.
No. 80.

TO THE REV. G. BAIRD.

February, 1791.

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

No. 81.

TO DR. MOORE.

Ellisland, 28th February, 1791.

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

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

* Tam o' Shanter.  † See vol. ii. p. 129.
Whether, after all, either the one or the other be of any real service to the dead, is, I fear, very problematical. But I am sure they are highly gratifying to the living; and as a very orthodox text, in Scripture, says, I forget where, " whatsoever is not of faith, is sin;" so say I, whatsoever is not detrimental to society, and is of positive enjoyment, is of God, the giver of all good things, and ought to be received and enjoyed by his creatures with thankful delight. As almost all my religious tenets originate from my heart, I am wonderfully pleased with the idea, that I can still keep up a tender intercourse with the dearly beloved friend, or still more dearly beloved mistress, who is gone to the world of spirits.

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

I have just read over once more, of many times, your Zeluco. I marked with my pencil, as I went along, every passage that pleased me

* See vol. i. p. 242.
particularly above the rest; and one or two, I think, which, with humble deference, I am disposed to consider unequal to the merits of the book. I have sometimes thought to transcribe these marked passages, or at least so much of them as to point where they are, and send them to you. Original strokes, that strongly depict the human heart, is your and Fielding's province, beyond any other novelist I have ever perused. Richardson might perhaps be excepted; but, unhappily, his dramatis personae are beings of some other world; and however they may captivate the inexperienced, romantic fancy of a boy or a girl, they will ever, in proportion as we have made human nature our study, dissatisfy our riper minds.

As to my private concerns, I am going on, a mighty tax-gatherer before the Lord, and have lately had the interest to get myself ranked on the list of excise as a supervisor. I am not yet employed as such, but in a few years I shall fall into the file of supervisorship by seniority.

I have had an immense loss in the death of the earl of Glencairn, the patron from whom all my fame and good fortune took its rise. Independent of my grateful attachment to him, which was indeed so strong that it pervaded my very soul, and was entwined with the thread of my existence; so soon as the Prince's friends had got in (and every dog, you know, has his day), my getting forward in the excise would have
been an easier business than otherwise it will be.

Though this was a consummation devoutly to be wished, yet, thank Heaven, I can live and rhyme as I am; and as to my boys, poor little fellows, if I cannot place them on as high an elevation in life as I could wish, I shall, if I am favoured so much by the Disposer of events as to see that period, fix them on as broad and independent a basis as possible. Among the many wise adages which have been treasured up by our Scottish ancestors, this is one of the best: "Better be the head of the commonalty than the tail o' the gentry."

But I have got on a subject, which, however interesting to me, is of no manner of consequence to you; so I shall give you a short poem* on the other page, and close this with assuring you how sincerely I have the honour to be, yours, &c.

*See vol. ii. p. 81.
TO THE REV. ARCH. ALISON.

Sir,

Ellisland, 14th Feb. 1791.

You must, by this time, have set me down as one of the most ungrateful of men. You did me the honour to present me with a book which does honour to science and the intellectual powers of man; and I have not even so much as acknowledged the receipt of it.

The fact is, you yourself are to blame for it. Flattered as I was by your telling me that you wished to have my opinion of the work, the old spiritual enemy of mankind, who knows well that vanity is one of the sins that most easily beset me, put it into my head to ponder over the performance with the look-out of a critic, and to draw up, forsooth, a deep, learned digest of strictures on a composition, of which, in fact, until I read the book, I did not even know the first principles.

I own, Sir, that at first glance, several of your propositions startled me as paradoxical. That the martial clangor of a trumpet had something in it vastly more grand, heroic, and sublime than the twingle-twangle of a Jew's harp; that the delicate flexure of a rose-twig, when the
half-blown flower is heavy with the tears of the dawn, was infinitely more beautiful and elegant than the upright stub of a burdock; and that from something innate and independent of all association of ideas. These I had set down as irrefragible, orthodox truths, until perusing your book shook my faith. In short, Sir, except *Euclid's Elements of Geometry*, which I made a shift to unravel by my father's fire-side, in the winter evenings of the first season I held the plough, I never read a book which gave me such a quantum of information, and added so much to my stock of ideas as your *Essays on the Principles of Taste*. One thing, Sir, you must forgive my mentioning as an uncommon merit in the work, I mean the language. To clothe abstract philosophy in elegance of style, sounds something like a contradiction in terms; but you have convinced me that they are quite compatible.

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

I am Sir, &c.
No. 83.

TO MR. CUNNINGHAM.

12th March, 1791.

If the foregoing piece be worth your strictures, let me have them. For my own part, a thing that I have just composed always appears through a double portion of that partial medium in which an author will ever view his own works. I believe, in general, novelty has something in it that inebriates the fancy, and not unfrequently dissipates and fumes away like other intoxication, and leaves the poor patient, as usual, with an aching heart. A striking instance of this may be adduced in the revolution of many a hymeneal honey-moon. But lest I sink into stupid prose, and so sacrilegiously intrude on the office of my parish priest, I shall fill up the page in my own way, and give you another song of my late composition, which will appear, perhaps, in Johnson's work, as well as the former.

You must know a beautiful Jacobite air, There'll never be peace till Jamie comes hame. When political combustion ceases to be the object of princes and patriots, it then, you know, becomes the lawful prey of historians and poets.
JACOBITE SONG.

By yon castle wa', at the close of the day,
I heard a man sing, though his head it was grey;
And as he was singing, the tears fast down came—
There'll never be peace till Jamie comes hame.

The church is in ruins, the state is in jars,
Delusions, oppressions, and murderous wars;
We dare na weel say't, but we ken wha's to blame—
There'll never be peace till Jamie comes hame.

My seven braw sons for Jamie drew sword,
And now I greet round their green beds in the yird;
It brak the sweet heart o' my faithfu' auld dame—
There'll never be peace till Jamie comes hame.

Now life is a burden that sair bows me down,
Sin' I tint my bairns, and he tint his crown;
But till my last moment my words are the same—
There'll never be peace till Jamie comes hame.

If you like the air, and if the stanzas hit your fancy, you cannot imagine, my dear friend, how much you would oblige me, if, by the charms of your delightful voïce, you would give my honest effusion "to the memory of joys that are past," to the few friends whom you indulge in that pleasure. But I have scribbled on till I hear the clock has intimated the near approach of

That hour o' night's black arch the key-stane.

So, good-night to you! Sound be your sleep, and delectable your dreams! Apropos, how do you like this thought in a ballad I have just now on the tapis?
Out-owre the Forth I look to the north,
But what is the north and its Highlands to me?
The south nor the east give ease to my breast,
The far foreign land, nor the wild rolling sea.

But I look to the west, when I gae to rest,
That happy my dreams and my slumbers may be,
For far in the west lives he I lo’e best,
The lad that is dear to my babie and me.

Good night, once more, and God bless you!

No. 84.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Ellisland, 11th April, 1791.

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

We meaner mortals must put up with the next rank of female excellence. As fine a figure and face we can produce as any rank of life whatever; rustic, native grace; unaffected modesty, and unsullied purity; nature’s mother-wit, and the rudiments of taste; a simplicity of soul, unsuspicious of, because unacquainted with the crooked ways of a selfish, interested, disingenuous world; and, the dearest charm of all the rest, a yielding sweetness of disposition, and a generous warmth of heart, grateful for love.
on our part, and ardently glowing with a more than equal return. These, with a healthy frame, a sound vigorous constitution, which your high ranks can scarcely ever hope to enjoy, are the charms of lovely woman in my humble walk of life.

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

No. 85.

TO MR. CUNNINGHAM.

Let me interest you, my dear Cunningham, in behalf of the gentleman who waits on you with this. He is a Mr. Clarke, of Moffat, principal schoolmaster there, and is at present suffering severely under the ...... of one or two powerful individuals of his employers. He is accused of harshness to ...... that were placed under his care. God help the teacher, if a man of sensibility and genius, and such is my friend Clarke, when a booby father presents him with his booby son, and insists on lighting up the rays of science, in a fellow's head whose scull is impervious and inaccessible by any other way than a positive fracture with
a cudgel—a fellow whom, in fact, it savours of impiety to attempt making a scholar of, as he has been marked a blockhead in the book of fate, at the almighty fiat of his Creator.

The patrons of Moffat school are, the ministers, magistrates, and town-council of Edinburgh; and as the business comes now before them, let me beg my dearest friend to do everything in his power to serve the interests of a man of genius and worth, and a man whom I particularly respect and esteem. You know some good fellows among the magistracy and council, ..................; but particularly, you have much to say with a reverend gentleman to whom you have the honour of being very nearly related, and whom this country and age have had the honour to produce. I need not name the historian of Charles V*. I tell him, through the medium of his nephew’s influence, that Mr. Clarke is a gentleman who will not disgrace even his patronage. I know the merits of the cause thoroughly, and say it, that my friend is falling a sacrifice to prejudiced ignorance, and ............

God help the children of dependence! Hated and persecuted by their enemies, and too often, alas! almost unexceptionably, received by their friends with disrespect and reproach, under the thin disguise of cold civility and humiliating advice. Oh! to be a sturdy savage, stalking in

* Dr. Robertson was uncle to Mr. Cunningham.
the pride of his independence, amid the solitary wilds of his deserts, rather than in civilized life, helplessly to tremble for a subsistance, precarious as the caprice of a fellow-creature!

Every man has his virtues, and no man is without his failings; and curse on that privileged plain-dealing of friendship, which in the hour of my calamity, cannot reach forth the helping hand without at the same time pointing out those failings, and apportioning them their share in procuring my present distress. My friends, for such the world calls you, and such ye think yourselves to be, pass by virtues if you please, but do, also, spare my follies. The first will witness in my breast for themselves, and the last will give pain enough to the ingenuous mind without you. And, since deviating more or less from the paths of propriety and rectitude, must be incident to human nature, do thou, Fortune, put it in my power, always from myself, and of myself, to bear the consequences of those errors. I do not want to be independent that I may sin, but I want to be independent in my sinning.

To return in this rambling letter to the subject I set out with, let me recommend my friend, Mr. Clarke, to your acquaintance and good offices. His worth entitles him to the one, and his gratitude will merit the other. I long much to hear from you. Adieu.
No. 86.

TO THE EARL BUCHAN.

My Lord,

Language sinks under the ardour of my feelings, when I would thank your lordship for the honour you have done me in inviting me to make one at the coronation of the bust of Thomson. In my first enthusiasm in reading the card you did me the honour to write me, I overlooked every obstacle, and determined to go; but I fear it will not be in my power. A week or two's absence, in the very middle of my harvest, is what, I much doubt, I dare not venture on.

Your lordship hints at an ode for the occasion; but who would write after Collins? I read over his verses to the memory of Thomson, and despaired. I got indeed to the length of three or four stanzas, in the way of address to the shade of the bard, on crowning his bust. I shall trouble your lordship with the subjoined copy of them, which, I am afraid, will be but too convincing a proof how unequal I am to the task*. However it affords me an opportunity

* See vol. i. p. 164.
of approaching your lordship, and declaring how sincerely and gratefully I have the honour to be, &c.

No. 87.

TO LADY E. CUNNINGHAM.

My Lady,

I would, as usual, have availed myself of the privilege your goodness has allowed me, of sending you any thing I compose in my poetical way; but as I had resolved, so soon as the shock of my irreparable loss would allow me, to pay a tribute to my late benefactor, I determined to make that the first piece I should do myself the honour of sending you. Had the wing of my fancy been equal to the ardour of my heart, the inclosed had been much more worthy your perusal. As it is, I beg leave to lay it at your ladyship's feet. As all the world knows my obligations to the late earl of Glencairn, I would wish to shew as openly that my heart glows, and shall ever glow, with the most grateful sense and remembrance of his lordship's goodness. The sables I did myself the honour to wear to his lordship's memory, were not the "mockery of woe." Nor shall my gratitude perish with me. If, among my children, I shall have a son that has a heart, he shall hand
it down to his child as a family honour, and a family debt, that my dearest existence I owe to the noble house of Glencairn!

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

No. 88.

TO MR. AINSLIE.

My dear Ainslie,

Can you minister to a mind diseased? Can you, amid the horrors of penitence, regret, remorse, head-ache, nausea, and all the rest of the damned hounds of hell, that beset a poor wretch who has been guilty of the sin of drunkenness—can you speak peace to a troubled soul?

Miserable perdu that I am, I have tried everything that used to amuse me, but in vain. Here must I sit a monument of the vengeance laid up in store for the wicked—slowly counting every chick of the clock as it slowly—slowly numbers over these lazy scoundrels of hours, who, damn them, are ranked up before me, every one at his neighbour’s backside, and every one with a burthen of anguish on his back, to pour on

* See vol. i. p. 238.
R 2
my devoted head—and there is none to pity me! My wife scolds me, my business torments me, and my sins come staring me in the face, every one telling a more bitter tale than his fellow.

When I tell you even ... has lost its power to please, you will guess something of my hell within, and all around me. I began *Elibanks* and *Elibraes*, but the stanza fell unenjoyed and unfinished from my listless tongue. At last, I luckily thought of reading over an old letter of yours that lay by me in my book-case; and I felt something for the first time, since I opened my eyes, of pleasureable existence.

Well! I begin to breathe a little since I began to write to you. How are you, and what are you doing? How goes law? Apropos, for connexion's sake do not address to me supervisor, for that is an honour I cannot pretend to. I am on the list, as we call it, for a supervisor, and will be called out by and bye to act as one; but at present I am a simple gauger, though the other day I got an appointment to an excise division of £.25 *per ann.* better than the rest. My present income, money down, is £.70 *per ann.*

I have one or two good fellows here whom you would be glad to know.
No. 89.

TO MISS DAVIES.

It is impossible, Madam, that the generous warmth and angelic purity of your youthful mind can have an idea of that moral disease under which I unhappily must rank as the chief of sinners. I mean a torpitude of the moral powers that may be called a lethargy of conscience. In vain remorse rears her horrent crest, and rouses all her snakes. Beneath the deadly fixed eye and leaden hand of indolence their wildest ire is charmed into the torpor of the bat slumbering out the rigours of winter in the chink of a ruined wall.

Nothing less, Madam, could have made me so long neglect your obliging commands. Indeed I had one apology—the bagatelle was not worth presenting. Besides, so strongly am I interested in Miss Davies's fate and welfare in the serious business of life, amid its chances and changes, that to make her the subject of a silly ballad is downright mockery of these ardent feelings. It is like an impertinent jest to a dying friend.

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

Why, dear Madam, must I wake from this delightful reverie, and find it all a dream? Why, amid my generous enthusiasm, must I find myself poor and powerless, incapable of wiping one tear from the eye of pity, or of adding one comfort to the friend I love? Out upon the world, say I, that its affairs are administered so ill!

They talk of reform. Good Heaven! what a reform would I make among the sous, and even the daughters of men! Down, immediately, should go fools from the high places where misbegotten chance has perked them up, and through life should they skulk, ever haunted by their native insignificance as the body marches accompanied by its shadow. As for a much more formidable class, the knaves, I am at a
loss what to do with them. Had I a world there should not be a knave in it.

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

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

No. 90.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Ellisland, 17th December, 1791.

Many thanks to you, Madam, for your good news respecting the little "flow'ret" and the "mother plant." I hope my poetic prayers have been heard, and will be answered up to the warmest sincerity of their fullest extent; and Mrs. Henry will find her little darling the representative of his late parent in every thing but his abridged existence.
I have just finished the following song, which, to a lady, the descendant of Wallace, and many heroes of his truly illustrious line, and herself the mother of several soldiers, needs neither preface nor apology.

SCENE.—A Field of battle. Time of the day—Evening. The wounded and dying of the victorious army are supposed to join in the following

SONG OF DEATH.

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

Thou grim king of terrors, thou life’s gloomy foe,
   Go, frighten the coward and slave:
Go, teach them to tremble, fell tyrant! but know,
   No terrors hast thou to the brave!

Thou strik’st the poor peasant—he sinks in the dark,
   Nor saves e’en the wreck of a name:
Thou strik’st the young hero—a glorious mark!
   He falls in the blaze of his fame!

In the field of proud honour—our swords in our hands,
   Our king and our country to save—
While victory shines on life’s last ebbing sands—
   Oh! who would not die with the brave?

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

No. 91.

**TO MRS. DUNLOP.**

5th January, 1792.

You see my hurried life, Madam. I can only command starts of time. However, I am glad of one thing; since I finished the other sheet, the political blast that threatened my welfare is overblown. I have corresponded with commissioner Graham; for the Board had made me the subject of their animadversions; and now I have the pleasure of informing you, that all is set to rights in that quarter.

Now, as to these informers, may the devil be let loose to . . . . . . .; but hold! I was praying most fervently in my last sheet, and I must not so soon fall a-swearin in this.

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

Your cup, my dear Madam, arrived safe. I had two worthy fellows dining with me the other day, when I, with great formality, produced my whigmêleerie cup, and told them that it had been a family-piece among the descendants of Sir William Wallace. This roused such an enthusiasm that they insisted on bumpering the punch round in it; and, by the bye, never did your great ancestor lay a Southron more completely to rest than, for a time, did your cup my two friends.

Apropos, this is the season of wishing. May God bless you, my dear friend, and bless me the humblest and sincerest of your friends, by granting you yet many returns of the season! May all good things attend you and yours wherever they are scattered over the earth!
TO MR. WILLIAM SMELLIE,

PRINTER.

Dumfries, 22d January, 1792.

I sit down, my dear Sir, to introduce a young lady to you, and a lady in the first ranks of fashion too. What a task! to you—who care no more for the herd of animals called young ladies than you do for the herd of animals called young gentlemen. To you—who despise and detest the groupings and combinations of Fashion as an idiotic painter that seems industrious to place staring fools and unprincipled knaves in the fore-ground of his picture, while men of sense and honesty are too often thrown in the dimmest shades.

Mrs. Riddel, who will take this letter to town with her and send it to you, is a character that, even in your own way, as a naturalist and a philosopher, would be an acquisition to your acquaintance. The lady, too, is a votary of the muses; and as I think myself somewhat of a judge in my own trade, I assure you that her verses, always correct, and often elegant, are much beyond the common run of the lady-poetesses of the day. She is a great admirer of
your book; and hearing me say that I was acquainted with you, she begged to be known to you, as she is just going to pay her first visit to our Caledonian capital.

I told her that her best way was to desire her relation, and your intimate friend, Craigdarroch, to have you at his house while she was there; and lest you might think of a lively West Indian girl of eighteen, as girls of eighteen too often deserve to be thought of, I shall take care to remove that prejudice. To be impartial, however, in appreciating the lady's merits, she has one unlucky failing—a failing which you will easily discover, as she seems rather pleased with indulging in it—and a failing that you will as easily pardon, as it is a sin which very much besets yourself. Where she dislikes or despises she is apt to make no more a secret of it than where she esteems and respects.

I will not present you with the unmeaning compliments of the season; but I will send you my warmest wishes and most ardent prayers, that Fortune may never throw your subsistence to the mercy of a knave, nor set your character on the judgment of a fool; but that, upright and erect, you may walk to an honest grave, where men of letters shall say, Here lies a man who did honour to science; and men of worth shall say, Here lies a man who did honour to human nature!
No. 93.

TO MR. CUNNINGHAM.

3d March, 1792.

Since I wrote to you the last lucubrious sheet I have not had time to write you farther. When I say that I had not time, that, as usual, means, that the three demons, indolence, business, and ennui, have so completely shared my hours among them as not to leave me a five minutes fragment to take up a pen in.

Thank Heaven, I feel my spirits buoying upwards with the renovating year. Now I shall in good earnest take up Thomson's songs. I dare say he thinks I have used him unkindly; and, I must own, with too much appearance of truth.

Apropos, do you know the much admired old Highland air called The Sutor's Dochter? It is a first-rate favourite of mine; and I have written what I reckon one of my best songs to it*. I will send it to you, as it was sung with great applause, in some fashionable circles, by Major Robertson, of Lude, who was here with his corps.

* See vol. iv. p. 97.
There is one commission that I must trouble you with. I lately lost a valuable seal, a present from a departed friend, which vexes me much. I have got one of your Highland pebbles which I fancy would make a very decent one; and I want to cut my armorial bearing on it. Will you be so obliging as to inquire what will be the expense of such a business?

I do not know that my name is matriculated, as the heralds call it, at all; but I have invented arms for myself, so you know I shall be chief of the name, and, by courtesy of Scotland, will likewise be entitled to supporters. These, however, I do not intend having on my seal. I am a bit of a herald, and shall give you, secedentem artem, my arms. On a field, azure, a holly bush, seeded, proper, in base; a shepherd's pipe and crook, saltier-wise, also proper, in chief. On a wreath of the colours, a wood-lark perching on a sprig of bay-tree, proper, for crest. Two mottoes; round the top of the crest, Wood-notes wild; at the bottom of the shield, in the usual place, Better a wee bush than nae bield. By the shepherd's pipe and crook I do not mean the nonsense of painters of Arcadia; but a Stock and Horn, and a Club, such as you see at the head of Allan Ramsay in Allan's quarto edition of the Gentle Shepherd.

By the bye, do you know Allan? He must be a man of very great genius. Why is he not more known? Has he no patrons? or do 'Poverty's cold wind and crushing rain beat
keen and heavy" on him? I once, and but once, got a glance of that noble edition of the noblest pastoral in the world; and dear as it was, I mean dear as to my pocket, I would have bought it, but I was told that it was printed and engraved for subscribers only. He is the only artist who has hit genuine pastoral costume.

What, my dear Cunningham, is there in riches that they narrow and harden the heart so? I think that were I as rich as the sun I should be as generous as the day; but as I have no reason to imagine my soul a nobler one than any other man's, I must conclude that wealth imparts a bird-lime quality to the possessor, at which the man, in his native poverty, would have revolted.

What has led me to this, is the idea of such merit as Mr. Allan possesses, and such riches as a nabob or government-contractor possesses, and why they do not form a mutual league. Let wealth shelter and cherish unprotected merit, and the gratitude and celebrity of that merit will richly repay it.
No. 94.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Annan Water Foot, 22d August, 1792.

Do not blame me for it, Madam. My own conscience, hacknied and weather-beaten as it is, in watching and reproving my vagaries, follies, indolence, &c. has continued to blame and punish me sufficiently.

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

Apropos (though how it is apropos, I have not leisure to explain), do you know that I am almost in love with an acquaintance of yours?—Almost! said I—I am in love, souse! over head and ears, deep as the most unfathomable abyss of the boundless ocean. But the word love, owing to the intermingledoms of the good
and the bad, the pure and the impure, in this world, being rather an equivocal term for expressing one’s sentiments and sensations, I must do justice to the sacred purity of my attachment.

Know then, that the heart-struck awe; the distant, humble approach; the delight we should have in gazing upon and listening to a messenger of Heaven, appearing in all the unspotted purity of his celestial home, among the coarse, polluted, far inferior sons of men, to deliver to them tidings that make their hearts swim in joy, and their imaginations soar in transport—such, so delighting, and so pure, were the emotions of my soul on meeting the other day with Miss B—, your neighbour at M—. Mr. B., with his two daughters, accompanied by Mr. H. of G., passing through Dumfries, a few days ago, on their way to England, did me the honour of calling on me; on which I took my horse (though God knows I could ill spare the time), and accompanied them fourteen or fifteen miles, and dined and spent the day with them. It was about nine, I think, when I left them; and, riding home, I composed the following ballad, of which you will probably think you have a dear bargain, as it will cost you another groat of postage. You must know that there is an old ballad beginning with

My bonie Lizzie Baillie
I’ll row thee in my plaidie, &c.

S3
So I parodied it as follows, which is literally the first copy, "unanointed, unannealed," as Hamlet says*

So much for ballads. I regret that you are gone to the east country, as I am to be in Ayrshire in about a fortnight. This world of ours, notwithstanding it has many good things in it, yet has ever had this curse, that two or three people who would be the happier the oftener they met together, are, almost without exception, always so placed as never to meet but once or twice a-year, which, considering the few years in a man's life, is a very great "evil under the sun," which I do not recollect that Solomon has mentioned in his catalogue of the miseries of man.

I hope and believe that there is a state of existence beyond the grave, where the worthy of this life will renew their former intimacies, with this endearing addition, that "we meet to part no more."

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

A thousand times have I made this apostrophe to the departed sons of men; but not one of them has ever thought fit to answer the question.

O that some courteous ghost would blab it out!

But it cannot be. You and I, my friend, must

* See vol. iv p. 23.
make the experiment by ourselves and for ourselves. However, I am so convinced that an unshaken faith in the doctrines of religion is not only necessary, by making us better men, but also by making us happier men, that I shall take every care that your little god-son, and every little creature that shall call me father, shall be taught them.

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

No. 95.

TO MR. CUNNINGHAM.

Dumfries, 10th September, 1792.

No! I will not attempt an apology. Amid all my hurry of business, grinding the face of the publican and the sinner on the merciless wheels of the excise; making ballads, and then drinking and singing them; and, over and above all, the correcting the press-work for two different publications; still, still I might have stolen five minutes to dedicate to one of the first of my friends and fellow-creatures. I might have done, as I do at present, snatched an hour near "witching time of night," and scrawled a page or two. I might have congratulated my friend on his marriage; or I might have thanked the Caledonian archers for the honour they have
done me; though, to do myself justice, I intended to have done both in rhyme, else I had done both long ere now.

Well, then, here is to your good health! for you must know, I have set a nipperkin of toddy by me, just by way of spell, to keep away the muckle horned deil, or any of his subaltern imps who may be on their nightly rounds.

But what shall I write to you? "The voice said cry; and I said, what shall I cry?"

I feel the presence of supernatural assistance! Circled in the embrace of my elbow-chair, my breast labours, like the bloated Sybil on her three-footed stool, and like her too, labours with nonsense. Nonsense, auspicious name! Tutor, friend, and finger-post in the mystic mazes of law; the cadaverous paths of physic; and particularly in the sightless soarings of school divinity, who, leaving Common Sense confounded at his strength of pinion, Reason delirious with eyeing his giddy flight, and Truth creeping back into the bottom of her well, cursing the hour that ever she offered her scorned alliance to the wizard power of Theologic Vision, raves abroad on all the winds—“On earth Discord!—a gloomy Heaven above, opening her jealous gates to the nineteen thousandth part of the tithe of mankind!—and below, an inescapable and inexorable hell, expanding its leviathan jaws for the vast residue of mortals!”
O doctrine! comfortable and healing to the weary, wounded soul of man! Ye sons and daughters of affliction—ye pauvres miserables, to whom day brings no pleasure, and night yields no rest, be comforted!—it is but one to nineteen hundred thousand that your situation will mend in this world—so, alas! the experience of the poor and the needy too often affirms—and it is nineteen hundred thousand to one, by the dogmas of ......, that you will be damned eternally in the world to come!

But of all Nonsense, religious Nonsense is the most nonsensical; so enough, and more than enough of it. Only, by the bye, will you, or can you tell me, my dear Cunningham, why a sectarian turn of mind has always a tendency to narrow and illiberalize the heart? They are orderly, they may be just, nay, I have known them merciful; but still your children of sanctity move among their fellow-creatures with a nostril-snuffing putrescence, and a footspurning filth; in short, with a conceited dignity that your titled ............... .............., or any other of your Scottish lordlings of seven centuries standing display when they accidentally mix among the many-aproned sons of mechanical life.

I remember, in my plough-boy days, I could not conceive it possible that a noble lord could be a fool, or a godly man could be a knave. How ignorant are plough-boys! Nay, I have since discovered that a godly woman may be a ......!
But hold—Here's t'ye again—this rum is generous Antigua, so a very unfit menstruum for scandal.

Apropos, how do you like, I mean really like, the married life? Ah! my friend, matrimony is quite a different thing from what your lovesick youths and sighing girls take it to be. But marriage, we are told, is appointed by God, and I shall never quarrel with any of his institutions. I am a husband of older standing than you, and shall give you my ideas of the conjugal state. En passant, you know I am no Latinist. Is not conjugal derived from jugum, a yoke? Well, then, the scale of good wifeship I divide into ten parts. Good nature, four; good sense, two; wit, one; personal charms, viz. a sweet face, eloquent eyes, fine limbs, graceful carriage (I would add a fine waist too, but that is soon spoilt, you know), all these, one; as for the other qualities belonging to, or attending on a wife, such as fortune, connexions, education (I mean education extraordinary), family blood, &c. divide the two remaining degrees among them as you please; only, remember that all these minor properties must be expressed by fractions, for there is not any one of them, in the aforesaid scale, entitled to the dignity of an integer.

As for the rest of my fancies and reveries—how I lately met with Miss L—— B——, the most beautiful, elegant woman in the world—how I accompanied her and her father's family
fifteen miles on their journey, out of pure devotion, to admire the loveliness of the works of God, in such an unequalled display of them—how, in galloping home at night, I made a bal-
lad on her, of which these two stanzas make a part*—behold all these things are written in the chronicles of my imagination, and shall be read by thee, my dear friend, and by thy beloved spouse, my other dear friend, at a more convenient season.

Now to thee, and to thy before-designed bosom-companion, be given the precious things brought forth by the sun, and the precious things brought forth by the moon, and the benignest influences of the stars, and the living streams which flow from the fountains of life, and by the tree of life, for ever and ever! Amen!

No. 96.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Dumfries, 24th September, 1792.

I have this moment, my dear Madam, yours of the twenty-third. All your other kind re-
proaches, your news, &c. are out of my head when I read and think on Mrs. H——'s situa-
tion. Good God! a heart-wounded, helpless

* The first and second. See the ballad at length, vol. iv. p. 23.
young woman—in a strange, foreign land, and that land convulsed with every horror that can harrow the human feelings—sick—looking, longing for a comforter, but finding none—a mother's feelings, too—but it is too much. He who wounded (he only can) may he heal *

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

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

* This lady had gone to the south of France, with her infant son, where she died soon after.
if Heaven will be so obliging as let me have them in proportion of three boys to one girl, I shall be so much the more pleased.

I hope, if I am spared with them, to shew a set of boys that will do honour to my cares and name; but I am not equal to the task of rearing girls. Besides, I am too poor; a girl should always have a fortune. Apropos, your little godson is thriving charmingly, but is a very devil. He, though two years younger, has completely mastered his brother. Robert is indeed the mildest, gentlest creature I ever saw. He has a most surprising memory, and is quite the pride of his school-master.

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

No. 97.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Supposed to have been written on the death of Mrs. Henry, her daughter.

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

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

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

No. 98.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Dumfries, 6th December, 1792.

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

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

Every other instance of the mortality of our kind makes us cast an anxious look into the dreadful abyss of uncertainty, and shudder with apprehensions for our own fate. But of how different an importance are the lives of different individuals? Nay, of what importance is one period of the same life more than another? A few years ago I could have lain down in the dust, "careless of the voice of the morning;" and now, not a few, and these most helpless individuals, would, on losing me and my exertions, lose both their "staff and shield."

By the way, these helpless ones have lately got an addition; Mrs. B. having given me a fine girl since I wrote you. There is a charming passage in Thomson's Edward and Eleanora.

The valiant, in himself, what can he suffer—
Or what need he regard his single woes?

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

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

T2
I do not remember to have heard you mention Thomson's dramas. I pick up favourite quotations, and store them in my mind as ready armour, offensive or defensive, amid the struggle of this turbulent existence. Of these is one, a very favourite one, from his *Alfred*,

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

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

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

I see you are in for double postage, so I shall e'en scribble out the other sheet. We, in this country here, have many alarms of the reforming,
or rather the republican spirit of your part of the kingdom. Indeed we are a good deal in commotion ourselves. For me, I am a place-man, you know; a very humble one indeed, Heaven knows, but still so much so as to gag me. What my private sentiments are, you will find out without an interpreter.

I have taken up the subject in another view; and, the other day, for a pretty actress’s benefit-night, I wrote an Address, which I will give you on the other page, called The Rights of Woman.

THE RIGHTS OF WOMAN;

An occasional Address, spoken by Miss Fontenelle, on her Benefit-night.

While Europe's eye is fix'd on mighty things,
The fate of empires and the fall of kings;
While quacks of state must each produce his plan,
And even children lisp the rights of man:
Amid this mighty fuss, just let me mention,
The rights of woman merit some attention.

First, in the sexes intermix'd connexion,
One sacred right of woman is protection.
The tender flower that lifts its head, elate,
Helpless, must fall before the blast of Fate,
Sunk to the earth, defac'd its lovely form,
Unless your shelter ward th' impending storm.

Our second rights—but needless here is caution,
To keep that right inviolate's the fashion;
Each man of sense has it so full before him,
He'd die before he'd wrong it—tis decorum.
There was, indeed, in far less polish'd days,
A time, when rough, rude man had naughty ways:
Would swagger, swear, get drunk, kick up a riot,
Nay, even thus, invade a lady’s quiet.
Now, thank our stars, these gothic times are fled:
Nay, well-bred men—and you are all well-bred—
Most justly think (and we are much the gainers)
Such conduct neither spirit, wit, nor manners.

For right the third, our last, our best, our dearest,
That right to fluttering female hearts the nearest,
Which even the rights of kings in low prostration
Most humbly own—’tis dear, dear admiration!
In that blest sphere alone we live and move;
There taste that life of life—immortal love!—
Smiles, glances, sighs, tears, fits, flirtations, airs,
‘Gainst such an host what flinty savage dares?
When awful beauty joins with all her charms,
Who is so rash as rise in rebel arms?

But truce with kings, and truce with constitutions;
With bloody armaments and revolutions;
Let majesty your first attention summon,
Ah! ca ira!—the majesty of woman!

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

No. 99.

TO MISS B*****; OF YORK.

Madam,

Among many things for which I envy those hale, long-lived old fellows before the flood, is this in particular, that when they met with any body after their own heart, they had a charming long prospect of many, many happy meetings with them in after-life. Now, in this short, stormy winter-day of our fleeting existence, when you now and then, in the chapter of ac-
cidents, meet an individual whose acquaintance is a real acquisition, there are all the probabilities against you that you shall never meet with that valued character more.

On the other hand, brief as the present miserable state of being is, it is none of the least of the miseries belonging to it, that if there is any miscreant whom you hate, or creature whom you despise, the ill run of the chances shall be so against you, that in the over takings, turnings, and jostlings of life, pop! at some unlucky corner, eternally comes the wretch upon you, and will not allow your indignation or contempt a moment's repose.

As I am a sturdy believer in the powers of darkness, I take those to be the doings of that old author of mischief, the Devil. It is well known that he has some kind of short-hand way of taking down our thoughts; and I make no doubt he is perfectly acquainted with my sentiments respecting Miss B. . . . ,—how much I admired her abilities and valued her worth—and how very fortunate I thought myself in her acquaintance. For this last reason, my dear Madam, I must entertain no hopes of the very great pleasure of meeting with you again.

Miss H—— tells me that she is sending a packet to you, and I beg leave to send you the enclosed sonnet, though, to tell you the real truth, the sonnet is a mere pretence, that I may have the opportunity of declaring with how much respectful esteem I have the honour to be, &c.
No. 100.

TO MISS C****.

Madam, August, 1793.

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

I enclose you two of my late pieces, as some kind of return for the pleasure I have received in perusing a certain MS. volume of poems in the possession of Captain Riddel. To repay one with an old song is a proverb, the force of which you, Madam, I know will not allow. What is said of illustrious descent is, I believe, equally true of a talent for poetry. No one ever despised it who had pretensions to it.

The fates and characters of the rhyming tribe often employ my thoughts when I am disposed to be melancholy. There is not, among all the martyrrologies that ever were penned, so rueful a narrative as the lives of the poets. In the comparative view of wretches, the criterion is not what they are doomed to suffer, but how they are formed to bear. Take a being of our kind, give him a stronger imagination and a more delicate sensibility, which, between them, will
ever engender a more ungovernable set of passions than are the usual lot of man—implant in him an irresistible impulse to some idle vagary, such as arranging wild flowers in fantastical nosegays, tracing the grasshopper to his haunt by his chirping song, watching the frisks of the little minnows in the sunny pool, or hunting after the intrigues of butterflies—in short, send him adrift after some pursuit which shall eternally mislead him from the path of lucre, and yet curse him with a keener relish than any man living for the pleasures that lucre can purchase—lastly, fill up the measure of his woes by bestowing on him a spurning sense of his own dignity, and you have created a wight nearly as miserable as a poet.

To you, Madam, I need not recount the fairy pleasures the muse bestows to counterbalance this catalogue of evils. Bewitching poetry is like bewitching woman. She has in all ages been accused of misleading mankind from the counsels of wisdom and the paths of prudence, involving them in difficulties, baiting them with poverty, branding them with infamy, and plunging them in the whirling vortex of ruin. Yet where is the man but must own that all happiness on earth is not worthy the name—that even the holy hermit's solitary prospect of paradisaical bliss is but the glitter of a northern sun, rising over a frozen region, compared with the many pleasures, the nameless raptures that we owe to the lovely queen of the heart of man!
No. 101.

TO JOHN M'NURDO, ESQ.

Sir, December, 1793.

It is said that we take the greatest liberties with our greatest friends; and I pay myself a very high compliment in the manner in which I am going to apply the remark. I have owed you money longer than ever I owed it to any man. Here is Ker's account, and here are six guineas; and now I don't owe a shilling to man—or woman either. But for these damned, dirty, dog's-ear'd little pages*, I had done myself the honour to have waited on you long ago. Independent of the obligations your hospitality has laid me under, the consciousness of your superiority in the rank of man and gentleman, of itself was fully as much as ever I could make head against; but to owe you money too was more than I could face.

I think I once mentioned something of a collection of Scottish songs I have for some years been making. I send you a perusal of what I have got together. I cannot conveniently spare them above five or six days; and five or six glances of them will probably more than suffice.

* Scottish bank-notes.
you. A very few of them are my own. When you are tired of them, please leave them with Mr. Clint of the King's Arms. There is not another copy of the collection in the world; and I shall be sorry that any unfortunate negligence should deprive me of what hast cost me a good deal of pains.

No. 102.

TO MRS. R****

Who was to bespeak a Play, one Evening, at the Dumfries Theatre.

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

As to the Tuesday's play, let me beg of you, my dear Madam, let me beg of you to give us, *The Wonder a Woman keeps a Secret*, to which please add, *The Spoilt Child*. You will highly oblige me by so doing.

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

"To play the shapes
Of frolic fancy, and incessant form
These rapid pictures, that assembled train
Of fleet ideas, never join'd before,
Where lively wit excites to gay surprise;
Or folly-painting humour, grave himself;
Calls laughter forth, deep-shaking every nerve."
But as you rejoice with them that do rejoice, do also remember to weep with them that weep, and pity your melancholy friend.

No. 103.

TO A LADY,

IN FAVOUR OF A PLAYER'S BENEFIT.

Madam,

You were so very good as to promise me to honour my friend with your presence on his benefit-night. That night is fixed for Friday first—the play a most interesting one—The Way to keep Him.

I have the pleasure to know Mr. G. well. His merit as an actor is generally acknowledged. He has genius and worth which would do honour to patronage. He is a poor and modest man; claims which, from their very silence, have the more forcible power on the generous heart. Alas! for pity, that from the indolence of those who have the good things of this life in their gift, too often does brazen fronted importunity snatch that boon—the rightful due of retiring, humble want!

Of all the qualities we assign to the Author and Director of nature, by far the most enviable is—to be able "to wipe away all tears from all eyes." Oh! what insignificant, sordid wretches
are they, however chance may have loaded them with wealth, who go to their graves, to their magnificent mausoleums, with hardly the consciousness of having made one poor, honest heart happy!

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

No. 104.

TO MRS. *****.

Dear Madam,

I MEANT to have called on you yesternight; but as I edged up to your box-door, the first object which greeted my view was one of those lobster-coated puppies sitting, like another dragon, guarding the Hesperian fruit.

On the conditions and capitulations you so obligingly offer, I shall certainly make my weather-beaten rustic phiz a part of your box-furniture on Tuesday, when we may arrange the business of the visit.

.........................

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

No. 105.

TO THE SAME.

I will wait on you, my ever-valued friend; but whether in the morning I am not sure. Sunday closes a period of our cursed revenue business, and may probably keep me employed with my pen until noon. Fine employment for a poet's pen!

There is a species of the human genus that I call the gin-horse class. What enviable dogs they are! Round and round they go! Mundell's ox, that drives his cotton-mill, is their exact prototype—without an idea or a wish beyond their circle—fat, sleek, stupid, patient, quiet, and contented—while here I sit, altogether Novemberish, a damned melange of fretfulness and melancholy; not enough of the one to rouse me to passion, nor of the other to repose me in torpor—my soul flouncing and fluttering round her tenement, like a wild finch caught amid the horrors of winter, and newly thrust into a cage.

Well, I am persuaded that it was of me the Hebrew sage prophesied, when he foretold—
"And behold, on whatsoever this man doth set his heart, it shall not prosper!"

If my resentment is awakened it is sure to be where I dare not squeak; and if:...........

Pray that wisdom and bliss be more frequent visitors of

R. B.

No. 106.

TO THE SAME.

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

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

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

One thing I shall proudly say, that I can pay Mrs. ...... a higher tribute of esteem, and appreciate her amiable worth more truly than any man whom I have seen approach her.
No. 107.

TO THE SAME.

I have often told you, my dear friend, that you had a spice of caprice in your composition, and you have as often disavowed it, even perhaps while your opinions were at the moment irrefragably proving it. Could any thing estrange me from a friend such as you?—No! To-morrow I shall have the honour of waiting on you.

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

No. 108.

TO THE SAME.

Madam,

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

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

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

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

No. 109.

TO JOHN SYME, ESQ.

You know, that among other high dignities,
you have the honour to be my supreme court
of critical judicature from which there is no
appeal. I enclose you a song* which I composed

* See vol. ii. p. 216.
since I saw you; and I am going to give you the history of it. Do you know that among much that I admire in the characters and manners of those great folks whom I have now the honour to call my acquaintances, the O...... family, there is nothing charms me more than Mr. O......'s unconcealable attachment to that incomparable woman.

Did you ever, my dear Syme, meet with a man who owed more to the Giver of all good things than Mr. O......? A fine fortune; a pleasing exterior; self-evident amiable dispositions; and an ingenuous upright mind, and that informed too, much beyond the usual run of young fellows of his rank and fortune; and to all this—such a woman! But of her I shall say nothing at all, in despair of saying any thing adequate.

In my song I have endeavoured to do justice to what would be his feelings on seeing, in the scene I have drawn, the habitation of his Lucy. As I am a good deal pleased with my performance, I, in my first fervour, thought of sending it to Mrs. O......; but, on second thoughts, perhaps what I offer as the honest incense of genuine respect, might from the well-known character of poverty and poetry, be construed into some modification or other of that servility which my soul abhors.
No. 110.

TO MISS ———.

Madam,

Nothing short of a kind of absolute necessity could have made me trouble you with this letter. Except my ardent and just esteem for your sense, taste, and worth, every sentiment arising in my breast, as I put pen to paper to you, is painful. The scenes I have passed with the friend of my soul and his amiable connexions! The wrench at my heart to think that he is gone, for ever gone from me, never more to meet in the wanderings of a weary world! and the cutting reflection of all, that I had most unfortunately, though most undeservedly, lost the confidence of that soul of worth ere it took its flight!

These, Madam, are sensations of no ordinary anguish. However, you, also, may be offended with some imputed improprieties of mine; sensibility you know I possess, and sincerity none will deny me.

To oppose those prejudices which have been raised against me, is not the business of this letter. Indeed it is a warfare I know not how to wage. The powers of positive vice I can in some degree calculate, and against direct ma-
levolence I can be on my guard; but who can estimate the fatuity of giddy caprice, or ward off the unthinking mischief of precipitate folly?

I have a favour to request of you, Madam, and of your sister Mrs. ——, through your means. You know, that at the wish of my late friend, I made a collection of all my trifles in verse which I had ever written. They are, many of them, local, some of them puerile and silly, and all of them unfit for the public eye. As I have some little fame at stake—a fame that I trust may live when the hate of those who "watch for my halting," and the contumelious sneer of those whom accident has made my superiors, will, with themselves, be gone to the regions of oblivion—I am uneasy now for the fate of those manuscripts. Will Mrs. —— have the goodness to destroy them, or return them to me? As a pledge of friendship they were bestowed; and that circumstance, indeed, was all their merit. Most unhappily for me that merit they no longer possess; and I hope that Mrs. ——'s goodness, which I well know, and ever will revere, will not refuse this favour to a man whom she once held in some degree of estimation.

With the sincerest esteem, I have the honour to be, Madam, &c.
No. 111.

TO MR. CUNNINGHAM.

25th February, 1794.

Canst thou minister to a mind diseased? Canst thou speak peace and rest to a soul tossed on a sea of troubles, without one friendly star to guide her course, and dreading that the next surge may overwhelm her? Canst thou give to a frame, tremblingly alive to the tortures of suspense, the stability and hardihood of the rock that braves the blast? If thou canst not do the least of these, why wouldst thou disturb me in my miseries with thy inquiries after me?

For these two months I have not been able to lift a pen. My constitution and frame were, ab origine, blasted with a deep incurable taint of hypochondria, which poisons my existence. Of late a number of domestic vexations, and some pecuniary share in the ruin of these cursed times; losses which, though trifling, were yet what I could ill bear, have so irritated me, that my feelings, at times, could only be envied by a reprobate spirit listening to the sentence that dooms it to perdition.

Are you deep in the language of consolation? I have exhausted, in reflection, every topic of
comfort. A heart at ease would have been charmed with my sentiments and reasonings; but as to myself, I was like Judas Iscariot preaching the gospel. He might melt and mould the hearts of those around him, but his own kept its native incorrigibility.

Still there are two great pillars that bear us up amid the wreck of misfortune and misery. The one is composed of the different modifications of a certain noble, stubborn something in man, known by the names of courage, fortitude, magnanimity. The other is made up of those feelings and sentiments, which, however the sceptic may deny them, or the enthusiast disfigure them, are yet, I am convinced, original and component parts of the human soul; those senses of the mind, if I may be allowed the expression, which connect us with, and link us to those awful, obscure realities—an all-powerful and equally beneficent God, and a world to come, beyond death and the grave. The first gives the nerve of combat, while a ray of hope beams on the field—the last pours the balm of comfort into the wounds which time can never cure.

I do not remember, my dear Cunningham, that you and I ever talked on the subject of religion at all. I know some who laugh at it as the trick of the crafty few to lead the undiscerning many; or at most as an uncertain obscurity which mankind can never know any thing of, and with which they are fools if they give them-
selves much to do. Nor would I quarrel with a man for his irreligion any more than I would for his want of a musical ear. I would regret that he was shut out from what appeared to me and to others such superlative sources of enjoyment.

It is in this point of view, and for this reason, that I will deeply imbue the mind of every child of mine with religion. If my son should happen to be a man of feeling, sentiment, and taste, I shall thus add largely to his enjoyments. Let me flatter myself that this sweet little fellow, who is just now running about my desk, will be a man of a melting, ardent, glowing heart; and possess an imagination delighted with the painter and rapt with the poet. Let me figure him wandering out, in a sweet evening, to inhale the balmy gales and enjoy the growing luxuriance of spring; himself the while in the blooming youth of life. He looks abroad on all nature, and through nature up to nature's God. His soul, by swift, delighting degrees, is wrapt above this sublunary sphere until he can be silent no longer, and bursts out into the glorious enthusiasm of Thomson—

These, as they change, almighty Father, these
Are but the varied God. The rolling year
Is full of thee.

And so on, in all the spirit and ardour of that charming hymn.

These are no ideal pleasures. They are real delights; and I ask what delights among the
sons of men are superior, not to say, equal to them? And they have this precious, vast addition, that conscious virtue stamps them for her own; and lays hold on them to bring herself into the presence of a witnessing, judging, and approving God.

No. 112.

TO MRS. ******.

Supposes himself to be writing from the dead to the living.

Madam,

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

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

........................................

VOL. III. X
Regret! remorse! shame! ye three hell-hounds that ever dog my steps and bay at my heels, spare me! spare me!
Forgive the offences, and pity the perdition of Madam, your humble slave.

No. 113.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

My dear friend, 15th December, 1795.

As I am in a complete Decemberish humour, gloomy, sullen, stupid, as even the deity of Dullness herself could wish, I shall not drawl out a heavy letter with a number of heavier apologies for my late silence. I shall only mention one, because I know you will sympathize in it. These four months, a sweet little girl, my youngest child, has been so ill, that every day a week or less threatened to terminate her existence.

There had much need be many pleasures annexed to the states of husband and father; for, God knows, they have many peculiar cares. I cannot describe to you the anxious, sleepless hours these ties frequently give me. I see a train of helpless little folks; me and my exertions all their stay; and on what a brittle thread does the life of man hang! If I am nipt off at the command of Fate, even in all the vigour of manhood as I am (such things happen every
day), gracious God! what would become of my little flock?

It is here that I envy your people of fortune. A father on his death bed, taking an everlasting leave of his children, has indeed woe enough; but the man of competent fortune leaves his sons and daughters independency and friends—while I—but I shall run distracted if I think any longer on the subject!

· · · · · · · · · · · · · ·

December, 24th.

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

ADDRESS,

_Spoken by Miss Fontenelle, on her Benefit-night, Dec. 4, 1795,
at the Theatre, Dumfries._

Still anxious to secure your partial favour,  
And not less anxious, sure, this night than ever, 
A prologue, epilogue, or some such matter,  
'Twould vamp my bill, said I, if nothing better;  
So, sought a poet, roosted near the skies,  
Told him, I came to feast my curious eyes;  
Said, nothing like his works was ever printed;  
And last, my prologue-business slyly hinted.

Ma'am, let me tell you, quoth my man of rhymes,  
I know your bent—these are no laughing times.

X 2
Can you—but Miss, I own I have my fears,
Dissolve in pause—and sentimental tears—
With laden sighs, and solemn rounded sentence,
Rouse from his sluggish slumbers fell Repentance;
Paint Vengeance as he takes his horrid stand
Waving on high the desolating brand,
Calling the storms to bear him o'er a guilty land!

I could no more—askance the creature eyeing,
D'ye think, said I, this face was made for crying?
I'll laugh that's poz—nay, more, the world shall know it;
And so, your servant—gloomy Master Poet.

Firm as my creed, Sirs, 'tis my fix'd belief,
That Misery's another word for Grief:
I also think—so may I be a bride!
That—so much laughter—so much life enjoy'd.

Thou man of crazy care and ceaseless sigh,
Still under bleak Misfortune's blasting eye;
Doom'd to that sorest task of man alive—
To make three guineas do the work of five:
Laugh in Misfortune's face—the beldam witch!
Say, you'll be merry, tho' you can't be rich.

Thou other man of care, the wretch in love,
Who long with jiltish arts and airs hast strove;
Measur'est in desperate thought—a rope—thy neck—
Or, where the beetling cliff o'erhangs the deep,
Peerest to meditate the healing leap:
Would'st thou be cur'd, thou silly, moping elf,
Laugh at her follies—laugh e'en at thyself:
Learn to despise those fiends now so terrific,
And love a kinder—that's your grand specific.

To sum up all, be merry, I advise;
And as we're merry, may we still be wise!

25th, Christmas Morning.

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

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

I have lately collected, for a friend's perusal, all my letters; I mean those which I first sketched in a rough draft, and afterwards wrote out fair. On looking over some old musty papers, which from time to time, I had parcellled by, as trash that were scarcely worth preserving, and which yet, at the same time, I did not care to destroy. I discovered many of those rude sketches, and have written, and am writing them out, in a bound MS., for my friend's library. As I wrote always to you the rhapsody of the moment, I cannot find a single scroll to you, except one, about the commencement of our acquaintance. If there were any possible conveyance I would send you a perusal of my book.
No. 114.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Dumfries, 20th December, 1795.

I have been prodigiously disappointed in this London journey of yours. In the first place, when your last to me reached Dumfries, I was in the country, and did not return until too late to answer your letter. In the next place, I thought you would certainly take this route; and now I know not what is become of you, or whether this may reach you at all. God grant that it may find you and yours in prospering health and good spirits. Do let me hear from you the soonest possible.

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

........................................
December 29.

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

This is the season (New-year’s day is now my date) of wishing; and mine are most fervently offered up for you. May life to you be a positive blessing, while it lasts, for your own sake! and that it may yet be greatly prolonged, is my wish for my own sake, and for the sake of the rest of your friends!

What a transient business is life! Very lately I was a boy; but the other day I was a young man; and I already begin to feel the rigid fibre and stiffening joints of old age coming fast over my frame. With all my follies of youth, and, I fear, a few vices of manhood, still I congratulate myself on having had, in early days, religion strongly impressed on my mind. I have nothing to say to any one as to what sect he
belongs to, or what creed he believes; but I look on the man who is firmly persuaded of infinite Wisdom and Goodness superintending and directing every circumstance that can happen in his lot—I felicitate such a man as having a solid foundation for his mental enjoyment—a firm prop and sure stay in the hour of difficulty, trouble, and distress—and a never-failing anchor of hope when he looks beyond the grave.

January 12.

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

* Edward.
No. 115.

TO MRS. ———.

20th January, 1796.

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

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

The muses have not quite forsaken me. The following detached stanzas I intend to interweave in some disastrous tale of a shepherd,
No. 116.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

31st January, 1796.

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

When pleasure fascinates the mental sight,
Affliction purifies the visual ray,
Religion hails the drear, the untried night,
That shuts, for ever shuts, life's doubtful day.
No. 117.

TO MRS. R******,

Who had desired him to go to the Birth-day Assembly, on that day, to shew his loyalty.

4th June, 1796.

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

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

R. B.
No. 118.

TO MR. JAMES JOHNSON,

EDINBURGH.

Dumfries, July 4, 1796.

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

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

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

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

Your ever,

Robert Burns.

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* It was in this humble and delicate manner that Burns requested a copy of a work of which he was the principal founder, and to which he had contributed, gratuitously, one hundred and eighty-four original, altered, or collected songs. Such an instance of generosity is not to be paralleled in the annals of literature.
No. 119.

TO MR. CUNNINGHAM.

My dear Cunningham, 

Brow, Sea-bathing Quarters, 

7th July, 1796.

I received yours here this moment, and am indeed highly flattered with the approbation of the literary circle you mention—a literary circle inferior to none in the two kingdoms. Alas! my friend, I fear the voice of the Bard will soon be heard among you no more. For these eight or ten months I have been ailing, sometimes bedfast and sometimes not; but these last three months I have been tortured with an excruciating rheumatism which has reduced me to nearly the last stage. You actually would not know me if you saw me—pale, emaciated, and so feeble, as occasionally to need help from my chair—my spirits fled!—fled! But I can no more on the subject; only the medical folks tell me that my last and only chance is bathing and country-quarters, and riding.

The deuce of the matter is this. When an exciseman is off duty his salary is reduced to £.35 instead of £.50. What way, in the name of thrift, shall I maintain myself and keep a horse in country-quarters—with a wife and five children at home—on £.35? I mention this, because I had intended to beg your utmost interest, and
that of all the friends you can muster, to move our commissioners of excise to grant me the full salary. I dare say you know them all personally. If they do not grant it me, I must lay my account with an exit truly en poete. If I die not of disease, I must perish with hunger.

I have sent you one of the songs. The other my memory does not serve me with, and I have no copy here; but I shall be at home soon, when I will send it you. Apropos to being at home, Mrs. Burns threatens in a week or two to add one more to my paternal charge, which, if of the right gender, I intend shall be introduced to the world by the respectable designation of Alexander Cunningham Burns. My last was James Glencairn; so you can have no objection to the company of nobility. Farewell.

No. 120.

TO MRS. BURNS.

My dearest Love,

I delayed writing until I could tell you what effect sea-bathing was likely to produce. It would be injustice to deny that it has eased my pains, and I think it has strengthened me; but my appetite is still extremely bad. No flesh nor fish can I swallow; porridge and milk is the only thing I can taste. I am very happy to hear, by Miss Jessy Lewars, that you are well.
My very best and kindest compliments to her and to all the children. I will see you on Sunday. Your affectionate husband, R. B.

No. 121.

TO MRS. DUNLOP*.

Madam, 12th July, 1796.

I have written you so often, without receiving any answer, that I would not trouble you again, but for the circumstances in which I am. An illness, which has long hung about me, in all probability will speedily send me beyond that "bourne whence no traveller returns." Your friendship, with which for many years you honoured me, was a friendship dearest to my soul. Your conversation, and especially your correspondence, were at once highly entertaining and instructive. With what pleasure did I use to break up the seal! The remembrance yet adds one pulse more to my poor palpitating heart. Farewell. R. B.

* This is the last production of Burns. He died nine days after.

THE END OF THE THIRD VOLUME.