





THE BURNS MONUMENT,
KILMARNOCK.

R A M B L E S

THROUGH THE

L A N D O F B U R N S .

BY

ARCHIBALD R. ADAMSON.

AUTHOR OF "RAMBLES ROUND KILMARNOCK," &c.

“ Thrice hallow'd the land of our Minstrel's birth,
 The fields that once gladden'd his eye,
 The echoes that rang to his woe and his mirth,
 And the mountains that bounded his sky !
 Lo ! *there* is the scene of his own Vision-dream—
 The mantle his Coila then wore,
 Still flower'd with the forest, enstriped with the stream,
 And fringed with the fret of the shore ! ”

HEW AINSLIE.

KILMARNOCK :

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THIS WORK,
ILLUSTRATIVE OF PLACES AND SCENERY
RENDERED FAMOUS
BY THE MUSE AND RESIDENCE OF SCOTLAND'S MINSTREL,
ROBERT BURNS,
IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED TO THE ADMIRERS
OF HIS GENIUS.

P R E F A C E .

—:0:—

To ramble through the land of Burns is an easy matter ; but to describe it, so as to make the reader enjoy it in a description, is a somewhat difficult task. Notwithstanding, after considerable misgiving, the writer has essayed it, and in following the footsteps of his illustrious countryman, ROBERT BURNS, from the cottage of his birth to the scene of his death and burial, he has called attention not only to the rich natural beauty of the various districts celebrated by the residence and muse of the Poet, but also to their historical and traditional associations, and to passages in his life and writings inseparably connected with them. Having done this, and pointed out numerous interesting objects, he lays no claim to originality, and aspires to no higher merit than that of having gathered a posy of other men's flowers and bound it together with a string of his own, in a manner, he fondly hopes, that will interest the reader and make it a not unworthy contribution to the thought-gemmed literary cairn already raised to the memory of the Peasant Poet.

A. R. A.

7 GLENCAIRN SQUARE,
KILMARNOCK, AUGUST, 1879.

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CHAPTER XIV.

**FROM KILMARNOCK TO MOSSGIEL—NOTES BY THE WAY—MOSSGIEL—
A NOISY RECEPTION—THE DWELLING-HOUSE—THE SPENCE—AN
INTERESTING RELIC—THE “MOUSE” AND “DAISY”—JOHN
BLANE’S RECOLLECTIONS—THE OLD DWELLING-HOUSE—THE
POET’S STUDY—THE SCENE OF “THE VISION”—THE POET’S
PERSONAL APPEARANCE AND MISFORTUNES WHEN IN THE FARM.**

HAVING roved by bonnie Doon and winding Ayr, and sketched the town of Kilmarnock, I would now, courteous reader, ask you to accompany me in a ramble to Mossgiel and the places of interest in its vicinity, which are inseparably associated with the poet’s name, for he removed there in May, 1784, and with his brother Gilbert began life anew with the little the family had been able to wrench from the avaricious grasp of the Lochlea landlord.

The day set apart for the journey being favourable, I left Kilmarnock at an early hour, and after a pleasant walk reached Crookedholm, an unpretentious hamlet chiefly occupied by miners, who find employment in numerous coalpits in its vicinity. Unimportant as it now is, it was at one time a place of some note, and, according to a work lately published,* possessed a “flour mill, a cloth factory, and a place of worship near the beginning of the eighteenth century.” Beyond it I passed two handsome Churches, crossed a substantial stone bridge, and entered Hurlford, another mining settlement which has assumed the proportions of a town within the memory of persons still living. This transition is owing to the presence of rich seams of coal in the vicinity, to the opening of the Portland Ironworks, and to its connection with a line of railway which bears away the produce, and brings the village into direct communication with the large centres of industry. The village possesses the churches referred to, a mechanics’ institute, a Post and Telegraph Office, a flourish-

* “Hurlford Sixty Years Ago,” &c., by M. Wilson.

ing co-operative store, a commodious police station, and a fair sprinkling of public houses and places of business. According to the work already quoted, "the inhabitants are a very mixed race, and a large proportion of them are either Irish or descendants of Irish. Of the exotic element of the population, a portion are Catholics, while those who are Protestants are Orangemen. Hence frequent quarrels leading to breaches of the peace arise between these two irreconcilable sections of Irishmen." From this it may be inferred that renewals of the obsolete sports of Donnybrook Fair are of common occurrence on pay nights, and that "a party man" need have no anxiety about turning blue-moulded for want of a sound thrashing.

The road to Mauchline branches off what may be termed Hurlford Cross. It was the way Burns came to and returned from Kilmarnock when residing at Mossgiel. Allan Cunningham states that John Wilson suggested the propriety of placing a piece of a grave nature at the beginning of the poems he printed, and that acting on the hint the bard composed or completed "The Twa Dogs" when walking home to Mossgiel. The local work quoted states that "the first wayside inn was kept by James Aiton; it was on the western side of the Mauchline Road, and he occupied it at the time Burns was in Mossgiel, and was having his poems printed by Wilson in Kilmarnock. He was acquainted with Burns, and being—like many Scotchmen of that era—an inveterate snuffer, was presented by the bard with a snuff-box. This box Aiton long retained, but after Burns had grown famous, he was often asked by his visitors for a pinch of snuff from the poet's box, and at last it was stolen from him." This is a very pleasing reminiscence, but the following is more so: An old man named Andrew Howat who "had wrought a good deal about coal-pits, which were then being worked at Norris Bank, about two miles on the road to Mauchline and about four miles from Mossgiel, remembered Burns, and related that most of the farmers in the district were known to him as coming to the *heugh* for coals. Burns, he said, came frequently and generally carried a book with him which he read by the way." How characteristic! "Some book he always carried and read," says David Sillars, and another writer records that he wore out two copies of

“The Man of Feeling” by carrying them about in his pocket—he walked like a thoughtful man and was always meditative when alone.

A short walk along Mauchline Road brought me to a bridge which spans the Cessnock—a streamlet celebrated by our poet in an early love song. It takes its rise at Auchmannoch Moor in the parish of Sorra, and forms some fantastic windings in which it serves as the boundary line between the parishes of Mauchline, Galston, and Riccarton, and empties itself into the Irvine a mile or so above Hurlford. Ellison Beggie, the heroine of the song referred to, was the daughter of a small farmer in the parish of Galston, but was a servant in a family on the banks of the Cessnock when Burns made her acquaintance. This attachment is spoken of as one of the purest he ever engaged in, and he declared in mature years, after he had visited Edinburgh, that of all the women he had ever seriously addressed, she was the one most likely to have formed an agreeable companion for life. He addressed a series of letters to her, and employs a song of thirteen stanzas to describe her personal charms, which tradition states were few in the eyes of her neighbours. Although his passion was not reciprocated, the poet maintained his suit with considerable warmth, and in addition to that dangerous mode of courtship—letter-writing—visited the fair one at her home, and “beneath the moon’s unclouded light” poured in her ear the language of love. Mrs Begg had a distinct recollection of this attachment, and related that her brother went frequently in the evenings to pay his addresses to the damsel, and generally returned home at a late hour; and Chambers tells us that “the old man resolved to administer to his son the practical rebuke of sitting up to let him in, and also to give him a few words of gentle admonition. When Robert returned that night the father was there to administer the intended correction, but the young bard defeated his plan. On being asked what had detained him so long, he began a whimsical narration of what he had met with and seen of the natural and supernatural on his way home, concluding with the particulars afterwards wrought up in the well-known verses in his ‘Address to the Deil’ :—

‘Ae dreary, windy, wintry night,
The stars shot down wi’ sklentia light,

Wi' you mysel' I got a fright,
 Ayont the lough ;
 Ye like a rash bush stood in sight,
 Wi' waving sough.

The cudgel in my nieve did shake,
 Each bristled hair stood like a stake,
 When wi' an eldrich, stoor quaick—quaick—
 Amang the springs,
 Awa' ye squattered like a drake
 On whistling wings !'

The old man was in spite of himself so much interested and amused by this recital as to forget the intended scolding, and the affair ended in his sitting up for an hour or two by the kitchen fire enjoying the conversation of his gifted son."

Beyond the bridge referred to a long stretch of road, which winds through an agreeably diversified landscape of gently rising grounds, lay before me. The walk proved lengthy and lonely, but the glorious sights and sounds of nature ministered delightfully to my eye and ear. I entered into conversation with a countryman driving a horse and cart in the direction I was pursuing. He was well acquainted with the district, and entertained the highest veneration of the Poet's memory, and seemed to dwell with fondness upon every little trait and anecdote associated with his name. When we came to Cross hands, where there is a school and a smith's shop, he said—"Robin was often here about, and in a corner o' a park ahent that wood there a horse o' his lies buried that dee'd wi' him when ploughin' ; but haud on an' ye'll see Mossgiel in a wee." The "wee" soon passed, and from the brow of a brae over which the road passes he pointed with his whip to a farmstead on the summit of a swelling piece of ground, and in a self-satisfied manner added—"There it is. The parks are the same, but the hoose is a' changed. Yonder's the ane he turned up the mouse's nest in ; but haud on a wee an' I'll set you doun at the yett o' the ane whaur he ploughed down the daisy. Haud along the side o't—it's the nearest way into the farm." Upon arriving at the yett I took leave of my rough good-natured friend and entered the field. A number of cows were browsing in it, and myriads of daisies spangled its surface. As I pensively gazed on the scene the following from the pen of William Scott Douglas, of Edinburgh, came to mind :—

"The warblers around me seem proud to repeat
 The wild notes that gave rapture to him ;
 And the daisies that spangle the ground at my feet
 Have their birth from the *one* of his theme ;
 There's a boast from yon belfry-tower borne on the breeze
 That it caught Robin's ear every day ;
 And the murmuring waters and whispering trees
 Can but sigh that their minstrel's away !"

My arrival in Mossiel farm-yard was announced by a demonstrative collie dog, whose "bow-wows" not only startled but caused me to think seriously about taking to my heels. Finding, however, that it kept at a respectful distance, I ventured forward, and as unconcernedly as possible addressed a sturdy servant girl and enquired for her master. "Just bide ye a wee, sir," said she, when she had left off scolding the guardian of the steading for kicking up such a row, "and I'll find him for you." Off she went on her mission, and left me to watch the dog and the dog to watch me, but he proved a good-natured brute and offered no further molestation. The dwelling-house is a substantial two-storeyed slated building, and bears no resemblance whatever to "the auld clay biggin'" which rises before the mind's eye when perusing "The Vision," while the offices which form an angle round the paved court are all modern and roofed in the same manner. The master soon made his appearance, and, in answer to my request, led the way into the house and began to show the little about the place which is associated with the poet's name. "This," said he, as he opened the door of a neatly-furnished room, "is 'the spence,' but the roof, as you will observe, is heightened, and the set-in beds which occupied the apartment when the Poet lived here are torn out." Yes, torn out and the place spoiled, thought I, but nevertheless I felt gratified to stand within the walls which had sheltered the most wonderful peasant that ever lived. On the walls the original copy of "The Lass o' Ballochmyle," and the letter which accompanied it, hang in separate frames, having been kindly placed there by the late Boyd Alexander, Esq. of Ballochmyle, for the inspection of visitors. The documents are somewhat faded and aged looking, but the bold vigorous writing of the poet is still legible, and almost as clear as it was when it left his pen. On the table lay a bulky visitors' book, which I was informed might have been filled over and over again had a

tithe of the pilgrims recorded their names. The first entry is dated "August 30, 1872," and is as follows:—"W. H. Glen, Melbourne, Australia, and Mrs W. H. Glen, Melbourne, Australia--both delighted with Mossiel and country round." Not a few are those of persons of distinction, and very many names belong to individuals who have travelled long distances to visit the lone farm steading. After a pleasant chat my cicerone next led me to the front of the house and pointed out a tall neatly-cut hedge, which the poet had planted with his own hands, and afterwards the fields wherein he turned up the "wee sleekit, cow'rin', timorous beastie's" nest, and turned down the "modest crimson-tipped flower" with the plough. These fields adjoin each other, and are in much the same condition as they were when the poet traversed them. An old man named John Blane, who had served in Mossiel when a boy, told Robert Chambers that he had a distinct recollection of the mouse's nest. "Burns was holding the plough, with Blane for his driver, when the little creature was observed running off across the field. Blane, having the *pettle*, or plough-cleaning utensil, in his hand at the moment, was thoughtlessly running after it to kill it, when Burns checked him, but not angrily, asking what ill the poor mouse had ever done him. The poet then seemed to his driver to turn very thoughtful, and during the remainder of the afternoon he spoke not. In the night-time he awoke Blane, who slept with him, and reading the poem which had in the meantime been composed, asked what he thought of the mouse now."

The incident was trivial, but it formed the groundwork of a beautiful and interesting poem, and evidenced his tenderness of heart: he saw in the smallest of all quadrupeds an "earth-born companion and fellow-mortal," and felt equally for a pet ewe, an auld mare, and a wounded limping hare.

The lines to "The Daisy" were composed while the poet was ploughing, but I am not aware of any anecdote associated with the incident. "These two poems," says a celebrated writer, "derive additional interest from the attitude in which the poet is himself presented to our view. We behold him engaged in the labours of the field, and moving in his humble sphere with all the dignity of honest independence and conscious genius."

The view from the height on which the farm-steading

stands is well described by William Wordsworth in the following sonnet :—

“‘There,’ said a stripling, pointing with much pride,
Towards a low roof, with green trees half-concealed,
‘Is Mossiel farm ; and that’s the very field
Where Burns plough’d up the daisy !’ Far and wide
A plain below stretched seaward, while, descried
Above sea clouds, the peaks of Arran rose ;
And by that simple notice, the repose
Of earth, sky, sea, and air was vivified.
Beneath the random bield of clod or stone,
Myriads of daisies have shown forth in flower
Near the lark’s nest, and in their natural hour
Have passed away ; less happy than the one
That, by the unwilling ploughshare, died to prove
The tender charm of poetry and love.”

Mossiel possesses very many interesting associations, but the only thing pertaining to the original steading is the walls. When they were heightened and repaired, every scrap of wood about the roof and floor was purchased by a boxmaking firm in Mauchline and converted into fancy ornaments, “warranted from the farm of Mossiel.” When the Burns family dwelt in it, it was a simple thatched cottage of one storey, which afforded the limited accommodation of a room and kitchen and a small garret which was reached by a trap stair. It contained a bed and a small table, which stood under a sloping window in the roof, and there Burns committed to paper the verses he composed during the day. John Blane, the gaudsman or driver already referred to, shared the bed with the poet, and in after years told of his services to him in amorous nocturnal visits to farm steadings, and how he was often roused from sleep to listen to newly-composed poems. These effusions were stored in a little drawer, and Chambers relates that the poet’s young sister often stole up after he had gone out to his afternoon labour to search it for verses he had just written off.

“When my father’s affairs grew near a crisis,” says the stolid, worldly-wise Gilbert in his memoir of the Poet, “Robert and I took the farm of Mossiel, consisting of 118 acres, at the rent of £90 per annum (the farm on which I live at present), from Mr Gavin Hamilton, as an asylum for the family in case of the worst. It was stocked by the property and individual savings of the whole family, and was a

joint concern amongst us. Every member of the family was allowed ordinary wages for the labour he performed on the farm. My brother's allowance and mine was seven pounds per annum each, and during the whole time this family concern lasted, which was four years, as well as during the preceding period at Lochlea, his expenses never in any one year exceeded his slender income. As I was entrusted with the keeping of the family accounts, it is not possible that there can be any fallacy in this statement in my brother's favour. His temperance and frugality were everything that could be wished." Really! and so they might, for whatever charges may be brought against the poet, his bitterest traducer cannot add that of extravagance to the list. Seven pounds a year! Egad, the sum is barely sufficient now-a-days to keep some of our young men in pipes and tobacco.

The room, or "spence" as it was termed, was the scene of "The Vision." To its seclusion the bard often withdrew of an evening when tired with "the thresher's weary flingin-tree."

"Ben i' the spence right pensivelie,
I gaed to rest."

"There, lanely, by the ingle cheek
I sat, and e'ed the spewin' reek,
That filled, wi' hoast-provoking smeeek,
The auld clay biggin' ;
And heard the restless rattons squeak
About the riggin'.

"A' in this motty, misty clime,
I backward mused on wasted time ;
How I had spent my youthful prime,
And done nae thing,
But stringing blethers up in rhyme,
For fools to sing.

.....
"When, click ! the string the sneck did draw,
And jee ! the door gaed to the wa',
And by my ingle-lowe I saw,
Now bleezing bright,
A tight, outlandish hizzie, braw,
Come full in sight.

.....
"With musing deep, astonished stare,
I viewed the heavenly-seeming fair,

A whispering throb did witness bear
 Of kindred sweet,
 When, with an elder sister's air,
 She did me greet.

“ ‘All hail ! my own inspired bard,
 In me thy native muse regard !
 Nor longer mourn thy fate as hard,
 Thus poorly low !
 I come to give thee such reward
 As we bestow .

“ ‘And wear thou this,’ she solemn said,
 And bound the holly round my head ;
 The polished leaves and berries red
 Did rustling play,
 And, like a passing thought, she fled
 In light away.”

His father's death and parting words seem to have made a deep impression on the poet's heart. When he entered Mossiel he did so with the determination of becoming wise. He read farming books, calculated crops, attended markets, and believed that “in spite of the world, the flesh, and the devil” he would succeed ; but alas ! the first year he purchased bad seed and the second lost half his crops by inclement weather and a late harvest. Things were trying enough, but when they were at their worst he solaced himself with song, and laid the foundation of his fame by composing the very cream of his poetry.

The four years the bard spent on this farm may be considered the most eventful of his chequered career. What agony of mind, what cares, troubles, and disappointments he experienced in the brief period, and what scenes of social enjoyments and literary triumphs he passed through ! From obscurity he rose to fame, and from abject poverty to comparative affluence—an affluence, however, of short duration.

After lingering about the celebrated and now classic spot, and gazing upon some stately plane trees beneath which the poet loved to recline, I took leave of my cicerone, and in passing the front of the house plucked a sprig from off the thorn hedge and carried it away as a keepsake. It lies on my desk withered and dry, but serves as a memento of a visit to the farm wherein Burns composed his keenest satires and

most beautiful poems and songs. Passing along a narrow unfenced road, I soon reached the highway, and after a walk of something like a mile entered Mauchline—a place to which Burns was often decoyed on “a nicht at e’en” to “pree the clachan yill” or perchance “the mou’ o’ some bonnie lass”—but more of him and it in next Chapter.



CHAPTER XV.

**MAUCHLINE—THE RISE AND PROGRESS OF THE BOX-MAKING TRADE—
NANSE TANNOCK'S HOUSE—THE HOUSE IN WHICH BURNS LIVED
AFTER HIS MARRIAGE—GAVIN HAMILTON'S HOUSE—THE PARISH
CHURCH—THE KIRK-YARD—THE HOLY FAIR—JOHN DOO AND
POOSIE NANSIE—THE PUBLIC GREEN AND MARTYRS' STONE: A
WORD ABOUT THEM—AN ANECDOTE OF BURNS AND JEAN ARMOUR
—THE AULD MANSE AND WHO WAS SEEN IN ITS HAUNTED ROOM
—THE HAGGIS.**

MAUCHLINE is situated in a beautiful district, and although somewhat scattered and irregularly built is a town of neat appearance and considerable bustle. Like many places in the shire it owes its origin to its church and priory, of which the tower behind the burying ground is the only remnant. "In 1510 a charter, erecting Mauchline into a free burgh of barony, was granted by James IV. ; and by the act of 1606 it will be observed that Mauchline was again constituted a free burgh of barony. The charters, however, are said to have been destroyed at the burning of the Register Office in Edinburgh, upwards of a hundred years ago, and they have never been renewed."* Otherwise, there is nothing of historical interest connected with the place. The weaving of cotton goods at one time formed the chief support of the inhabitants, but, alas ! that trade has received an irreparable shock, and the sound of the shuttle is no longer heard in the streets. The staple industry at present is the manufacture of fancy ornaments, snuff boxes, card cases, &c. It is curious how this industry originated, and still more so how it has developed itself, and made Mauchline known throughout Great Britain, America, and the Continent of Europe. A French gentleman, on a visit to Sir Alexander Boswell at Auchinleck House, having the misfortune to break a handsome curiously-hinged snuff-box, sent it to the late Mr Wyllie, the village

* 'History of the County of Ayr.'

watch-maker, to be repaired. During the process, the workman into whose hands it was given inadvertently allowed some solder to run into the joint, and consequently rendered it useless. To remedy the mishap he taxed his ingenuity, and tried every possible means to remove the obstruction, but without success. Latterly he succeeded in making an instrument that answered the purpose so well that the difficulty was overcome, and the hinge put in working order. Being pleased with his success in repairing, the workman—a Mr Crawford—next conceived the idea of making a *fac simile* of the Frenchman's box and presenting it to Sir Alexander. The magical or secret hinge taxed his mechanical skill, but by the aid of the instrument he had made he succeeded in imitating it, and that so well that orders flowed in, and the manufacture of such boxes became his sole occupation. To monopolise the trade, both master and man kept the formation of the hinge a secret, and that for twelve years; but a misunderstanding arising between them, they separated, and each carried on the box-making business on his own account. Crawford settled in Cumnock, and introduced the trade there; but, having employed a watchmaker to make a hinge-forming instrument like unto what he made himself, its use was suspected, and the secret in a short time ceased to be private: one firm after another sprang up in neighbouring towns until the industry assumed considerable proportions. On this hinge—of which a bed-ridden Laurencekirk cripple named Steven is said to have been the inventor—the fancy wood trade in Mauchline is founded; but the honour of its introduction belongs to the late Andrew Smith, a genius who, though bred a stone-mason, raised himself by energy, self-culture, and perseverance to a very respectable position. Having, like others, discovered the secret of the snuff-box hinge, he put it to practical use, and opened a small manufactory in the village, in which he employed three men as box-makers. This venture proving a success, Andrew took his brother William into partnership, and his business habits, combined with his own creative genius, did much to make the industry the staple of the place. It is now fully sixty years since this species of manufacture was introduced into Mauchline, but during that period it has undergone many changes, and snuff-boxes are now the least of its products—

beautifully-fashioned articles of ornament and use being turned out in great variety. The trade is so far developed by the application of steam and mechanical science that an article can now be purchased for a couple of shillings which at one time would have cost as many pounds. There are at present three factories in the place, and close on 400 people find constant employment in them.

When residing in Mossgiel, Burns found many attractions in Mauchline, not the least of which were the lasses, the Masonic Lodge, the debating society, and the delusive pleasures of the ale-house. But at this stage it will be as well to resume the narrative and call attention to what is deemed worthy of regard.

The walk from Mossgiel to Mauchline proved pleasant and enjoyable. Upon entering the town I passed up a long street of clean, comfortable dwelling-houses, and in a very short time arrived in what may be appropriately termed the Cross, but not without being honoured with many a "glower" from chatty village belles, gossiping wives, and garrulous dames of one description and another who idled at doors in the seemingly earnest discussion of some all-important subject. Many of the houses in the vicinity of the local centre are modern; but one old-fashioned thoroughfare which branches off it and steals between two rows of venerable thatched cottages is of peculiar interest, being associated with the Poet's name. Accosting a middle-aged man, he kindly, and in a somewhat self-satisfied manner, pointed to an old house on the left, in which there is at present a tinsmith's shop, and said, "This was Nanse Tannock's place, and that two-storeyed red-stone building on the other side is the one in which Burns began housekeeping with his Jean; that is the auld kirkyard in which the 'Holy Fair' was held, and yonder is the house in which Gavin Hamilton lived, and the window of the office in which Burns and Jean were married." What was at one time the howf of Nanse Tannock is a rickety thatched building of two stories, with a wooden stair going up from the street door to the upper apartments—which, by the bye, have an entrance into a small yard adjoining the burying-ground, which was at one time unenclosed. Nothing remains to indicate this judicious ale wife's residence but the nails which secured her signboard above the door, and these are pointed

to as objects of curiosity by the residents—a circumstance certainly which indicates that the most is made of everything pertaining to the poet.

It is pretty evident that Burns frequented Nanse Tannock's change-house, and that its walls have often rung with the laughter which followed his sallies of wit. In it he promised to drink the health ("nine times a week") of those M.P.'s who would devise some scheme to remove the "curst restriction on aqua vitæ;" but when Nanse heard of it she is reported to have said "that he might be a very clever lad, but he certainly was *regardless*, as, to the best of her belief, he had never taken three half-mutchkins in her house in all his life." This may be, but facts are very much against her. The Rev. P. Hately Waddell says—"Mrs Nelly Martin or Miller, who died December 22, 1858, aged 92, and was originally sweetheart to the Poet's brother William, was intimately acquainted also with the Poet himself, and confirmed in the most earnest and emphatic manner, as if living over again in his society the scenes of her youth, the rumours of the extraordinary gift of eloquence with which he was even then endowed. According to her account, to escape from his tongue, if once entangled by it, was almost an impossibility. 'He was unco, by-ordinar engagin' in his talk.' For which reason he was an invaluable visitor at the change-house, where Nanse Tannock had a jesuitical device of her own for detaining him. Nanse carried a huge leather pouch at her side, slung from her waist (as old Scotch landladies used to do), filled with keys, pence, 'change,' and *et ceteras*. When application for Burns was made at her door—as was often the case, 'for atweel he was uncolie in demand'—by personal friends of his or rivals of her own—'Is Rab here?' or 'Is Mossiel here?'—Nanse would thrust her hand into her capacious leather pouch, and, jingling ostentatiously among keys and coppers, would solemnly and fraudulently declare 'that he wasna *there* (in her pouch) that night!'—Rab, in reality, being most probably engaged at the very moment in rehearsing his last poetical effusion, 'The Holy Fair' or 'The Twa Herds,' to an ecstatic audience in the parlour." The same writer goes on to say that it was in Nanse Tannock's parlour that "the first reading of 'The Holy Fair' took place, when there were present Robert and his sweet-

heart, Jean Armour; William and his sweetheart, Nelly Miller; and 'anither lad or twa and their sweethearts. Robin himsel' was in unco glee. He kneelit ontill a chair in the middle o' the room, wi' his elbows on the back o't, and read owre "The Holy Fair" frae a paper i' his han'—and sic laughin'! we could hardly steer for laughin'; an' I never saw himsel' in sic glee.' It must be observed, however, that both the quantity and the quality of 'refreshment' on this, as on other similar occasions, were very moderate indeed—'three ha'penny yill, twa or three bottles for the company' being the average reckoning, with a glass or two of whisky at most. . . . Miss Brown, Mauchline, states that her father well remembered Robert Burns, and has seen him frequently at Nanse Tannock's after his marriage, carrying his eldest son aloft on his hand, balancing and tossing the child in paternal pride towards the kitchen ceiling. Very beautiful indeed is this homely picture; and Jean herself undoubtedly would be there."

The house in which Burns resided is nearly opposite that of Nanse Tannock. It is a substantial two-storied thatched building containing several apartments. The one up stairs on the left is that in which the Poet and his darling Jean spent their honeymoon—a fact which induces many visitors to call and stare with a kind of reverence at the walls of the room and at the set-in-bed in which the happy pair slept; indeed some strangers—but more especially American—are so enthusiastic that they beg pieces of the wood, and several, I was informed, were so foolish as to get into it altogether.

Holding along a path which skirts the churchyard wall, and winds round the back of what was the residence of Gavin Hamilton, the early friend and patron of the poet, I crossed a rude bridge which spans a trickling narrow stream at the base of the hoary remnant of the priory already mentioned, and after some little difficulty entered a shady lane. This brought me to the gate of the neatly laid out grounds which front the now celebrated and almost classic abode which is quaint and old-fashioned in appearance and highly picturesque from its situation.

Gavin Hamilton was a legal practitioner of high respectability, and is described as having been a "man of spirit and

intelligence—generous, affable, and enlightened.” Gilbert Burns says—“The farm of Mossgiel, at the time of our coming to it, was the property of the Earl of Loudoun, but was held in tack by Mr. Gavin Hamilton, writer in Mauchline, from whom we had our bargain ; who had thus an opportunity of knowing and showing a sincere regard for my brother before he knew that he was a poet. The Poet’s estimation of him, and the strong outlines of his character, may be collected from the dedication to this gentleman. When the publication was begun, Mr. H. entered very warmly into its interests and promoted the subscription very extensively.” It is almost unnecessary to add that he and Burns were on the most intimate terms, and that he had the poet’s warmest sympathy when subjected to the petty annoyances of the kirk-session for digging a few potatoes in his garden on a Sabbath morning. In his office—which is still shown — Burns was married to Jean Armour, not in a ceremonial way, but according to the law of the land and as surely as if the contract had received the sanction of a benchful of bishops. It appears from the session record that the ceremony was performed on the 3rd August, 1788, and also that the poet generously gave a guinea to the poor of the parish on being told that it was customary for the bridegroom to pay a small fine when an irregular marriage was contracted. This room is also memorable as that in which “The Calf” was committed to paper. Burns called on his friend one day when going to church, and finding him suffering from gout, jocularly promised to return and give him the text. He did so, and the humorous satire was the result.

Upon leaving what is commonly termed “Gavin Hamilton’s house,” I found my way to the gate of the churchyard, which is close by, and luckily found it open. The church is a handsome edifice in the Gothic style, with a turreted square tower ninety feet in height. It occupies the site of the old barn-looking building in which “Daddy Auld” held forth. Hew Ainslie describes it in his *Pilgrimage to the Land of Burns* as having been as ugly an old lump of consecrated stone as ever cumbered the earth. “It seems,” he says, (“if one might judge by the arched lintels that attempted to peep through the rough plaster), to have been set up by Gothic hands ; and if so, Presbyterianism has really been tolerably

successful in beating it into its favourite model—a barn. The interior is, if possible, more dismal. Cold, damp, dark, and dirty, looking dissolution, and smelling decay, and a fitter place one could hardly imagine for crying ‘tidings of damnation’ in. Besides the ground floor it contains two wonderful looking things called lofts. One stretches from the east gable down into the body of the kirk; the other sticks out from the wall opposite the pulpit, supported by two wooden pegs, which gives it quite the dangerous look of that cunning engine, the mouse trap. Beneath this queer canopy, Jasper pointed out the ‘cutty stool’ where Burns sat when ‘Mess John, beyond expression, fell foul o’ him;’ ‘But,’ said the bellman, ‘tho’ that’s the bit whar he sat, it’s no the seat. It’s been made into a twa-armed chair, for behoof o’ a society there wha haud his birthday.’”

It is stated in Spottiswood’s Church History that George Wishart, the celebrated martyr of the Scottish Reformation, was invited to preach in Mauchline Church in 1554. “On his arriving at the place it was found that the Sheriff of Ayr, an enemy to the new faith, had placed a guard of soldiers in the church to keep him out. Some of the country people offered to force an entrance for him, but he would not suffer them, saying: ‘It is the word of peace I preach unto you; the blood of no man shall be shed for it this day; Christ is as mighty in the fields as in the church; and he himself, when in the flesh, preached oftener in the desert and upon the sea shore than in the temple of Jerusalem.’ Then walking along to the edge of the moor, on the south side of Mauchline, he preached for three hours and upwards to the multitude that flocked about him.”

At one time “tent preachings” and common fairs were held in the churchyard of Mauchline, but it has undergone an alteration for the better, and is now enclosed by a high wall, and compares favourably with the best kept village burying-grounds in the shire. After inspecting the church, I began to stray among the grass-covered graves, and conjure up the scene so graphically described by the poet—a by no means difficult task when one is acquainted with the incidents of *The Holy Fair* and remaining landmarks. The back of Gavin Hamilton’s house forms part of the boundary. A little further along, the upper portion of Nanse Tannock’s

house, and two or three old rickets, serve the same purpose ; but the first has the accommodation of a back door which, in the good dame's time, opened into the churchyard, and through which droves of drouthy saints poured,

“ To gie the jars and barrels
A lift that day.”

In front, the Cowgate retains a streak or two of its original appearance, for the house which Poesie Nansie occupied is but little changed, and that in which Jean Armour's father lived has undergone no very great alteration. The same, however, cannot be said of “the holy spot,” for it is thickly studded with modern tombstones, and very few specimens of ancient sculpture are to be met with. Despite this it is interesting to ramble among the hillocks and scan the memorials of individuals who were associates of the bard or themes of his muse. Entering a gravelled walk that winds round the church, I turned to the left, and at a short distance from the tower paused before a plain upright stone which bears the following inscription :—“ IN MEMORY OF A. D. J. JOHN MORRISON, OF THE 104TH REGIMENT, WHO DIED AT MAUCHLINE, 16TH APRIL, 1804, IN THE 80TH YEAR OF HIS AGE. ALSO, HIS DAUGHTER, MARY, THE POET'S BONNIE MARY MORRISON, WHO DIED 29TH JUNE, 1791, AGED 20 ; AND HIS SECOND SPOUSE, ANN THOMLIESON, WHO DIED SEPTEMBER, 1831, AGED 76.” So this is the resting place of the amiable girl who made such an impression on the youthful poet's heart when attending the dancing school at Tarbolton, thought I, and yet she is pronounced unknown. The song in Mary's honour was a juvenile production, but notwithstanding it is considered to be the most pathetic of the poet's love effusions.

“ Oh Mary, at thy winflow be,
It is the wished, the trysted hour !
Those smiles and glances let me see,
That make the miser's treasure poor.
How blithely wad I bide the stoure,
A weary slave frae sun to sun,
Could I the rich reward secure,
The lovely Mary Morison.”

A little to the south of the church “Holy Willie's weel-worn clay” has “ta'en up its last abode.” Nothing marks the

spot, but the best and most enduring memorial of this individual is his well-known prayer; it will survive the wreck of many things, and keep his memory green when obliteration has wiped the inscription off every stone in the yard. The holy man was no better than the poet said he was: that he was an arrant hypocrite the events of his life testify. After being convicted of pilfering money from the church offerings, his morals did not improve, and he ultimately ended his days in a roadside ditch, having been jolted out of a cart which was conveying him and other inebriates home from a country fair. The carter—who appears not to have been altogether *compos mentis* himself—never missed Willie, or knew of the accident, until the dead body of the unfortunate man was discovered next morning. So ended the life of a practical dissembler; but, unfortunately, specimens of his class are not rare, for individuals are still to be found who

“ — display to congregations wide,
Devotion's every grace, except the heart.”

A short distance from Willie's narrow bed the remains of Nansie Tannock and Racer Jess are stowed away under the sward. The first died in comfortable circumstances, and, like a judicious browster wife, maintained to the last that Burns never drank twa half-mutchkins in her house in a' his life, and that what he stated in his poems was just a wheen “leein' blethers.” Perhaps she was right after all, for it is evident—at least to the writer—that he exercised the poetic license in the matter of dram-drinking. Jess, poor lass, closed her mortal race somewhat suddenly on the 15th February, 1813. She was the daughter of Poesie Nansie, a dame of whom something will be presently said, and was remarkable for her pedestrian powers and the running of errands: hence her cognomen.

In an out-of-the-way corner of the churchyard, which appears to be a repository for rubbish, I stumbled across a massive stone tablet. Having my attention attracted by the name Auld, I set to work and cleared the moss and dirt from the inscription, and made out the following:—“THE REVEREND MR. WILLIAM AULD, MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL AT MAUCLINE, DIED 12TH DECEMBER, 1791, IN THE 50TH YEAR OF HIS MINISTRY, AND THE 81ST OF HIS AGE.” Little need

be said regarding Daddy Auld. That Burns satirised him, and that he rebuked Burns before the congregation for a certain moral lapse, is well known. He was a good man, but somewhat over zealous, and doubtless too severe on Gavin Hamilton for digging a few potatoes on the Sabbath; but what else could he be when hounded on by men like Holy Willie? Holding along the back of the church, I came to the burying-place of the Armour family. At its head there is a very handsome tombstone, and over the grave a common flag, much worn and scratched, which bears the following faded inscription:—"ELIZABETH RIDDLE, DAUGHTER OF ROBERT BURNS AND JEAN ARMOUR, BORN AT DUMFRIES 21ST NOVEMBER, 1793, DIED AT MAUCHLINE IN THE AUTUMN OF 1795." A short distance from this burying-place there is a humble tombstone to the memory of an obscure Covenanter, which states that "HERE LIES INTERRED THE CORPSE OF JAMES SMITH, WHO WAS WOUNDED BY CAPTAIN INGLIS AND HIS DRAGOONS AT THE BURN OF ANN IN KYLE, AND THEREAFTER DIED OF HIS WOUNDS IN MAUCHLINE PRISON, FOR HIS ADHERENCE TO THE WORD OF GOD AND SCOTLAND'S COVENANTED WORK OF REFORMATION.—A.D. 1682."

Every reader is, or at least should be, aware that Mauchline Churchyard is the scene of *The Holy Fair*. On it the poet met Fun, his cronie dear, and in "fine remarkin'" put an effectual stop to practices which were a disgrace to Scotland. "Holy Fairs" have happily passed away, but Robert Burns, by his "priest-skelping turns," and the scathing, withering sarcasm of the poem referred to, caused their expulsion, and worked a much needed reformation in the ecclesiastical affairs of Mauchline parish. In his day, the time appointed for the dispensation of the Lord's Supper was looked forward to by the peasantry as a kind of festival, and farm servants, when taking "a fee," were in the habit of making an agreement that they would be allowed to "gang to the preaching" on such an occasion during their period of service. All this wanted reforming, and it was only a satirist like our poet who could apply the lash and make the victim writhe under every stroke. This he did; but, to the eternal honour of his name, he never ridicules the ordinance itself, nor utters a sneer at the "worship of God in spirit and in truth." No. Although often

“ Misled by Fancy’s meteor ray,”

he had a sincere regard for religion, and believed—in fact, he states in a letter to Mrs Dunlop that

“ ’Tis *this* 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 his dart,
 Within the breast bids purest raptures rise,
 Bids smiling conscience spread her cloudless skies.”

Mauchline Holy Fair was an event of no small importance in the district. People came long distances to be present at it, and while it lasted the public houses did a thriving business.

“ Now but and ben the change-house fills
 Wi’ yill-caup commentators,
 Here’s crying out for bakes and gills,
 And there the pint-stoup clatters ;
 While thick and thrang, and loud and lang,
 Wi’ logic and wi’ Scripture,
 They raise a din that in the end
 Is like to breed a rupture
 O’ wrath that day.”

The Communion was celebrated in the church, but the churchyard, in which there was a rostrum or moveable pulpit and “ a shed to fend the showers and screen the country gentry,” presented an animated appearance. The scene is graphically described by the Poet, but a still more racy picture is given in a pamphlet bearing date 1759, which purports to be *A Letter from a Blacksmith to the Ministers and Elders of the Church of Scotland, in which the manner of public worship in that church is considered, its inconveniences and defects pointed out, and methods for removing them humbly proposed.* “ At the time of the administration of the Lord’s Supper upon the Thursday, Saturday, and Monday,” says the writer, “ we have preaching in the fields near the church. At first you find a great number of men and women lying together upon the grass ; here they are sleeping and snoring, some with their faces towards heaven, others with faces turned downwards, or covered with their bonnets ; there you find a knot of young fellows and girls making assignations to go home together in

the evening or meet in some alehouse ; in another place you see a pious circle sitting round an ale-barrel, many of which stand ready upon carts for the refreshment of the saints. The heat of the summer season, the fatigue of travelling, and the greatness of the crowd naturally dispose them to drink, which inclines some of them to sleep, works up the enthusiasm of others, and contributes not a little to produce those miraculous conversions that sometimes happen at these occasions—in a word, in this sacred assembly there is an odd mixture of religion, sleep, drinking, courtship, and a confusion of sexes, ages, and characters. When you get a little nearer the speaker, so as to be within reach of the sound though not the sense of the words—for that can only reach a small circle—you will find some weeping and others laughing, some pressing to get nearer the tent or tub in which the parson is sweating, bawling, jumping, and beating the desk ; others fainting with the stifling heat, or wrestling to extricate themselves from the crowd ; one seems very devout and serious, and the next moment is scolding or cursing his neighbour for squeezing or treading on him ; in an instant after his countenance is composed to the religious gloom, and he is groaning, sighing, and weeping for his sins—in a word, there is such an absurd mixture of the serious and comic that were we convened for any other purpose than that of worshipping the God and Governor of Nature the scene would exceed all power of *face*." How like the poet's description ! From this we know he did not exaggerate, but drew his picture from the life, and poured out the phials of his indignation against the cant and hypocritical humbug of his time.

“ Here sits a raw of tittling jades
 Wi' heaving breasts and bare neck,
 And there a batch o' wabster lads
 Blackguarding frae Kilmarnock,
 For fun this day.

“ Here some are thinking on their sins,
 And some upon their claes ;
 Ane curses feet that fyl'd his shins,
 Anither sighs and prays ;
 On this hand sits a chosen swatch
 Wi' screwed-up, grace-proud faces ;
 On that a set o' chaps at watch,
 Thrang winking on the lasses
 To chairs that day.

“ O happy is that man and blest !
 (Nae wonder that it pride him !)
 Wha's ain dear lass that he likes best
 Comes clinkin' doun beside him !
 Wi' arm repos'd on the chair back,
 He sweetly does compose him ;
 Which, by degrees, slips round her neck,
 An's loof upon her bosom,
 Unkenned that day.

“ Now a' the congregation o'er
 Is silent expectation :
 For Moodie speels the holy door
 Wi' tidings o' d——tion.
 Should Hornie, as in ancient days,
 'Mang sons o' God present him,
 The vera sight o' Moodie's face
 To's ain het hame had sent him
 Wi' fright that day.

“ Hear how he clears the points o' faith
 Wi' rattlin' an' wi' thumpin' !
 Now meekly calm, now wild in wrath,
 He's stampin' an' he's jumpin' !
 His lengthen'd chin, his turn'd-up snout,
 His eldritch squeal and gestures,
 Oh, how they fire the heart devout,
 Like cantharidian plasters,
 On sic a day !”

Opposite the churchyard gate is the street along which “Common Sense took the road” on a certain minister making his appearance at *The Holy Fair*. At one corner is the house in which “Poesie Nansie” resided, and the entry at which “Racer Jess,” and two or three ladies of questionable virtue, stood “blinking,” while the people were gathering to celebrate “the Fair,” and at the other a substantial building with the following inscribed on its front chimney :—

“ This is the house, though built anew,
 Where Burns came weary frae the plough,
 To ha'e a crack wi' Johnny Doo
 On nicht at e'en,
 Or whiles to taste his mountain dew
 Wi' bonnie Jean.”

Why a house can be the same after being rebuilt is difficult to understand, but I suppose the poet must be awarded the usual license. The building, however, which occupied the

site when Burns walked the streets of Mauchline, was an inn, and if tradition is to be trusted, it was a favourite resort of his. On the back window of an upper room he scribbled the following amusing epitaph on John Dow, the landlord, which was doubtless more truthful than pleasing to that worthy :—

“ Here lies Johnny Pidgeon ;
 What was his religion ?
 Whae'er desires to ken,
 To some ither warl'
 Maun follow the carl,
 For here Johnny Pidgeon had nane.

“ Strong ale was ablution,
 Small beer persecution,
 A dram was *mementi mori* ;
 But a full flowing bowl
 Was the joy of his soul,
 And port was celestial glory.”

The gable of Jean Armour's father's house adjoined the back of the premises, and Burns, it is said, often sat at the window referred to and conversed with her in the language of the eyes—a language, by the by, which lovers aptly understand and appreciate.

The house in which Jean's parents resided is a lowly thatched cottage, but from the fact that it sheltered *her* and *them*, it possesses peculiar interest.

Observing that the house celebrated by the residence of “ Poesie Nansie ” is “ licensed to retail spirits, porter, and ales,” I entered for the double purpose of weetin' my whistle and seeing the relics in possession of the occupants. I was shown a caup *supposed* to have been used by the “ randie gangrel bodies ” who

“ held the splore
 To drink their orra duddies,”

and also an old engraving representing the merry crew in the midst of their festivities.

Poesie Nansie was a Mrs. Gibson, who lodged vagrants and other questionable characters. The halt, the blind, and the lame found shelter beneath her roof, and her kitchen was not unfrequently the scene of frantic mirth and bouts of drunkenness. Here Burns studied humanity in its lowest forms, and his “ Jolly Beggars ” is supposed to have been

founded on a scene which he witnessed in the establishment. Chambers says—"In company with his friends, John Richmond and James Smith, he dropped accidentally at a late hour into the humble hostelry of Mrs. Gibson. . . . After witnessing much jollity among a company who by day appeared abroad as miserable beggars, the three young men came away, Burns professing to have been greatly amused with the scenes, but particularly with the gleesome behaviour of an old maimed soldier. In the course of a few days he recited a part of the poem to Richmond, who informed me that, to the best of his recollection, it contained, in its original complete form, songs by a sweep and a sailor which did not afterwards appear."

Having strolled to the Cross, I turned up a lane which terminates at the public green—a triangular piece of ground on which the *seven* annual fairs of the district are held. It is memorable on account of the five martyrs "who suffered for Christ and their adherence to the Covenanted work of Reformation" buried in it, and also for being the spot where Burns had his second interview with Jean Armour. "There was a race at the end of April," says Robert Chambers, "and there it was customary for the young men, with little ceremony, to invite such girls as they liked off the street into a humble dancing hall, where a fiddler had taken up his station to give them music. The payment of a penny for a dance was held by the minstrel as guerdon sufficient. Burns and Jean happened to be in the same dance, but not as partners, when some confusion and a little merriment was excited by his dog tracking his footsteps through the room. He playfully remarked to his partner that 'he wished he could get any of the lasses to like him as well as his dog did.' A short while after, he passed through Mauchline washing green, where Jean, who had overheard the remark, was bleaching clothes. His dog running over the clothes, the young maiden desired him to call it off, and this led them into conversation. Archly referring to what had passed at the dance, she asked 'if he had yet got any of the lasses to like him as well as his dog did?' From that time their intimacy commenced." Of course, Jean was one of the "Mauchline belles," and according to the poet's notion was "the flower o' them a'." After he was married to her, he very sensibly and

justly said, that he could easily *fancy* a more agreeable companion in his journey through life, but had never *seen* the individual instance.

From the public green I strolled down an avenue and paused before the old manse. It is a quaint, curiously formed building, and was the residence of the celebrated Daddy Auld. Daddy's wife was supposed to be a witch, and according to tradition kept queer company—indeed, it is handed down that a servant girl saw the devil warming his hoofs at a fire in one of the rooms. The old gentleman sat with his tail twisted over his knee, but the moment the maid screamed and let fall the shovelfull of fuel she carried, he vanished. Perhaps it was wrong, but I went up and saw "the haunted room," and the spot where his devilship enjoyed a short respite from

"Spairgin about the brunstane cootie
To scaud poor wretches,"

but beheld nothing remarkable, and came away somewhat disappointed, for instead of it being clad with cobwebs and dust, like the haunted chambers we read about, it was scrupulously clean, and wore an air of quiet comfort.

From the old manse, a short walk brought me to Ballochmyle road, and ultimately to the upper end of the Cowgate. Here I again paused, and while thinking on the flight of "Common Sense" from the "Holy Fair," looked upon a snug thatched cottage with a porched doorway, which stands near some mean buildings a little way down the celebrated thoroughfare. It is pointed to as the house in which Burns composed his exquisite address to "a Haggis," and on this account possesses a peculiar interest in the eyes of those who see a charm in everything associated with the poet's name. It was at one time occupied by a Mr. Robert Morrison, a great crony of the poet when he resided at Mossgiel, and it is said that he was in the habit of spending the interval between the church services on the Sabbath-day at this gentleman's fireside. On one of these occasions, Mrs. Morrison invited the bard to partake of a haggis "whose hurdies like a distant hill" almost concealed "the groaning trencher." Having done so to his evident delight and inward satisfaction, he wrote the "address," and well he might, for

a proper haggis is worthy of a "grace as lang's my arm" at any time.

From Mauchline I pushed on to Ballochmyle, but what was seen and heard there and at Barskimming will be reserved for next chapter.



CHAPTER XVI.

BALLOCHMYLE—THE BRAES—THE LASS O' BALLOCHMYLE—HER ACCOUNT OF MEETING THE POET—BURNS' SEAT—THE POET'S LETTER TO MISS ALEXANDER—APOLOGIES FOR HER SILENCE—THE BOWER—CAUGHT BY THE GAMEKEEPER—CATRINE—AN EXCURSION PARTY—THE RIVER AYR—BALLOCHMYLE BRIDGE—HAUGH—BARKSKIMMING BRIG—“MAN WAS MADE TO MOURN”—THE RAILWAY STATION—BACK TO KILMARNOCK.

BALLOCHMYLE, the seat of Colonel Claud Alexander, M.P. for South Ayrshire, is situated on the Catrine Road, some mile and a half from Mauchline. Although the scenery through which the road winds cannot be termed enchanting, it is at least pleasing, and I enjoyed it and the fragrance of the hay and flowers which the breeze bore from the uplands and wafted across the fields as I strolled on my way. Groups of happy, brown-faced, bare-legged children, who seemingly were returning from school, were gathering posies of daisies and golden dandelions here and there along the wayside in the vicinity of the town, and it made my heart glad to watch them and listen to their innocent laughter as it waked the echoes and mingled with the music of the birds. When I reached the entrance to the estate I found the gate fast, and it was not until I gave a few authoritative raps with my stick that a maiden issued from an antique flower-embowered cot, which nestles beautifully beneath some old trees, to admit me. With many thanks for her courtesy, I passed along the fine drive which winds through dense masses of wood and shrubbery, and in due time arrived in front of the mansion. All was quiet, and save the birds that flitted and chirruped in the trees or sought food on the lawn, no sign of life was to be witnessed. Although surrounded by a scene of bewildering beauty, a sense of loneliness weighed me down, for as yet I was an unauthorised visitor. To remedy this I set off in quest of my friend the keeper, and in my explorations stum-

bled into a secluded path in the shrubbery which leads down to the river Ayr. The solitude was peculiarly impressive. There was a cloudless sunshine, but nothing was heard save the murmuring of the current as it made its way among stones and pieces of rock impeding its progress. Steep banks and precipices, draped in most luxuriant natural wood, rose from the water edge in majestic loveliness, and cast long shadows on the ripples and smooth glassy spaces of the stream. Here the grass and herbage extended close to the brink, and trees bent over and laved the tips of their boughs in the current; there a wall of rock rose from the bed, which looked as if it had been hewn by rough, careless workmen, who in their haste had left many a shelf protruding. On these, and in the intervening spaces, ferns and shrubs grew, and far up on the top of all, on the very brink of the chasm, trees clung to crag and tightly grasped pieces of rock with their knotty fingers. It is a never-to-be-forgotten scene, and I am not at all surprised that the poetic fancy of Burns was roused by witnessing it. Following the path, I entered the thicket, and in its intricate windings over the braes was soon lost among confused stems, bushes, branches, and clustering green leaves which had succeeded those which lay withered and dead on the verge of the rustic footway. Several times I was nearly tripped up by moss-grown tree roots, and more than once startled by rabbits which my unexpected appearance had surprised while basking in gleams of sunshine which fell on the green sward through openings in the trees.

Having threaded this narrow path for some considerable distance, I came to a broader but not less romantic one, for the leafy canopy of interlaced branches continued, and the wild grandeur of the scene, if possible, became more fascinating. Having followed it a short distance, I reached a rustic bower or grotto of ornamental twig work and moss. It was a familiar object, and I at once knew that I had reached the spot where Burns unexpectedly met "The Lass o' Ballochmyle," who, as the reader is probably aware, was a Miss Wilhelmina Alexander, a sister of Mr Claud Alexander, a gentleman who had realized a fortune in India and purchased the estate from Sir John Whiteford, the friend of Burns, and the representative of a once powerful Ayrshire family. The bard sung the departure of the kind gentleman in a set of plaintive verses,

in which he makes his daughter Maria take farewell of the lovely braes.

“ Through faded groves Maria sang,
Hersel' in beauty's bloom the while,
And aye the wildwood echoes rang,
Fareweel the braes o' Ballochmyle.”

Those lovely braes were a favourite resort of the poet when residing in the farm of Mossgiel. One July evening, when walking on them, he somewhat suddenly met Miss Alexander. The lady's account of the interview—if interview it can be called—is that she encountered the poet, whom she describes as “a plain-looking man,” musing with his shoulder against one of the trees, and that the evening being far advanced and the grounds forbidden to strangers, she was startled, but recovering herself, passed on and thought no more of the matter. Burns, however, was impressed with the glimpse he got of the beauty, and according to the tradition of the district, remained and composed the song in which her charms are celebrated. The place where he is said to have sat and strung the lovely lyric is only a few paces from the grotto. It is situated at the extreme end of a narrow neck of land, jutting out into the ravine through which the river flows, and is in every way a lovely situation for poet or painter to muse in. A few old trees cluster together, and by their interlaced branches form a kind of bower over “the seat,” while down below the river joins in chorus with the song of the birds. When I stood there, I did so with a deep sense of enjoyment to the soft buzzings of the insects around and of the myriads of blue-bells which dyed the dell as they kept nodding in the balmy breeze that swayed their fragile stems. All around was life—fresh, delightful, enjoyable life—and as I stood motionless,

“ The merry, young rabbits came leaping
Over the crest of the hill,
Where the clover and corn lay sleeping
Under the sunlight still.”

Some months after the incident, Burns wrote the lady, and in a very beautiful letter asked permission to publish the song he had composed in her honour. He says :—“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 endeavours 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 twig 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 was 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 Villainy 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."

To this letter—of which the above is a portion—the bard received no reply. Dr. Currie says:—"Her modesty might prevent her from perceiving that the muse of Tibullus breathed in this nameless poet, and that her beauty was awakening strains destined to immortality on the banks of the Ayr. It may be conceived also that, supposing the verse duly appreciated, delicacy might find it difficult to express its acknowledgments." Chambers, on the other hand, says:—"The apology now presented by the family for Miss Alexander's conduct is, that she unfortunately fell amongst those who entertained an unfavourable opinion of his character. Feeling it to be necessary to decline yielding to his request, she thought that that resolution would be intimated most delicately towards him, as well as in the manner most agreeable to herself, by simply allowing the letter to remain unanswered. It is easy to enter into the feelings of a sensible

woman of thirty in adopting this course, and even to make some allowance for others not acknowledged, which might cause her to shrink from the acquaintance of a humble tenant of her brother (for Mossgiel now belonged to Mr. Alexander) who, in the exercise of an assumed poetic privilege, dared to imagine her as his mistress. However this might be, Miss Alexander and her kindred learned afterwards to think the woods of Ballochmyle classic, and herself immortal through the genius of Burns. On a question occurring many years after as to the disposal of the original manuscript of the song, Miss Alexander said that there could be no dispute on that point: 'wherever she went it must go.' Miss Alexander died unmarried in 1843, in the eighty-ninth year of her age.

The rustic bower, erected in commemoration of the abrupt meeting, is a neat circular erection with an open front. It contains a row of seats and an oaken board, on which the following is inscribed in *fac simile* of the poet's handwriting:—

“ ’Twas even, the dewy fields were green,
 On every blade the pearls hang,
 The zephyr wantoned round the bean,
 And bore its fragrant sweets along :
 In every glen the mavis sang,
 All Nature listening seemed the while,
 Except where greenwood echoes rang
 Among the braes o' Ballochmyle.

“ With careless step I onward strayed,
 My heart rejoiced in Nature's joy,
 When, musing in a lonely glade,
 A maiden fair I chanced 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 !”

After sitting in the bower listening to the music of the woods and holding communion with my thoughts, I rose to depart, but had not taken many steps when I was confronted by a man with a double-barrelled gun under his arm. “Ho,” said he, “what are you doing here?” A glance was sufficient to show that I stood face to face with the vigilant head keeper, and that a prompt answer was absolutely necessary. This I made, and drew his attention to the fact that we had met

before. In an instant he was at my service, and proffered to assist me in any way.

Being now an authorised visitor, I took leave of my friend after some pleasant conversation, and commenced the journey to Mauchline railway station. As I moved forward I had an excellent view of the wooded precipitous banks of the Ayr, and of the village of Catrine—a circumstance which brought to mind the fact that it was there that Professor Dugald Stewart, the expositor of the Scottish system of metaphysics, had his residence, and that it was at his table Burns “dinner’d wi’ a lord.” The professor narrates that the manners of the poet on the occasion were “simple, manly, and independent; strongly expressive of conscious genius and worth, but without anything that indicated forwardness, arrogance, or vanity.”

The small but startling incidents of the route added a sort of piquancy to the enjoyment of the scene. At one time I startled a partridge, at another a blackbird, which flew with a sudden flutter and a wild cry from a thicket where its nest was hid. The rustling grass and fern fronds, too, bespoke the sudden flight of rabbits—indeed, numbers of them hurried off in timorous haste at my approach, while almost unconsciously muttering—

“Tell me, fellow-creatures, why
At my presence thus you fly?
Why disturb your social joys,
Parent, filial, kindred ties?
Common friend to you and me,
Nature’s gifts to all are free.”

A sudden turn in this secluded walk brought me to a neat foot-bridge which spans a broad macadamised road. Here I paused and listened to a party of homeward-bound excursionists who made the wildwood echoes ring, as with stentorian voices they bade a heart-fond adieu to the lovely scenes they were leaving behind. The words of their song were peculiarly appropriate, and, as the sound of their voices became faint by distance, the following snatch smote my ear :—

“But here, alas! for me nae mair
Shall birdie charm, or floweret smile;
Fareweel the bonnie banks of Ayr,
Fareweel, fareweel! sweet Ballochmyle!”

Upon crossing the bridge I found myself on the verge of

the river and near to a vast wall of red sandstone towering from its channel. The scene is most imposing, but why the stream is thus imbedded I am unable to say—possibly the rock has been rent asunder by some great convulsion, or (though very doubtful) the water has worn a passage for itself. Upon descending some steps cut in the rock, I came upon an angler straying along the brink of the water casting and trailing his line in hopes to catch a trout, but, although he tried every artifice, the finny tribe remained shy, and he disappointed. However, it was not for want of fish, for several rose farther down the stream in a dark, deep pool to snap at unwary flies hovering near the glassy surface.

Keeping in the shade of the massive rocks which rise from the river bed, I soon reached the stupendous erection called Ballochmyle Bridge. It makes a gigantic sweep across the ravine through which the Ayr flows, and rises to a height of 184 feet above its channel. It has an imposing appearance, and eclipses everything of the kind in Great Britain in point of magnitude and elegance. Its foundation stone was laid with Masonic honours on the 10th of September, 1846, and the structure was completed in the month of August, 1848. Near it is the celebrated quarry from which the beautiful red sandstone is procured that makes buildings throughout Ayrshire so conspicuous. The stone is worked to a great depth, but its bottom has not been reached, and the supply appears to be as inexhaustible as it was when operations first began.

Beyond the bridge a beautiful path winds along the foot of the verdant precipices and steep descents which line the river bank. Holding along it, I soon reached "the never-failing brook" which propels the wheel of "the busy mill," and entered Haugh, a very small village consisting of a group of cottages, an agricultural implement maker's shop, a woollen and a curling stone factory.

Finding nothing here worth a sentence, I enquired my way to Barskimming Bridge, and was directed to a small roadway at the end of the village. Out of it, according to instructions, I entered a stile road or beaten track which winds through a couple of fields. Cattle were browsing in them. At my approach they lifted their heads and looked at me with long and wary observation; but being satisfied that my mission

was peace, they again bent their heads and began to crop the pasture.

At the termination of the carpet-like path, I found myself in the highway between Mauchline and Stair, and close at the old bridge of Barskimming, a spacious structure of one arch which spans the Ayr a little below the confluence of the Lugar. Its situation is peculiarly romantic and pleasing. Immediately above it, on the south side of the stream, Barskimming Mill nestles beneath the shade of an immense wall of sandstone, which appears to have been hewn by the hand of man to make room for the diminutive structure. Below, a curve conceals the river from sight, but beyond it, it flows through a perfect chasm of towering rocks which are decked and crowned by the most luxuriant vegetation. Over this wildly romantic gulf, a bridge connects the lands of Barskimming and gives access to the princely mansion which nestles in the beautifully laid off grounds of the estate.

While leaning on the parapet of the bridge enjoying the scenery, I accosted a passing wayfarer, and asked to be shown the holm where Burns composed, "Man was made to Mourn." "Man, it's no here," said he, "its on the Doon." "Na, na, John," said a middle-sized, pleasant-featured old woman who was standing near with a bundle of faggots in her apron, "you are wrong, far wrong, it was no such thing, but it was owre in that holm there, where my kye are, that the poet made 'Man was made to Mourn.' Often have I heard my old father speak about it; he knew Burns and them all, but they are all gone." "And what were the circumstances?" said I, for I must confess that I was somewhat fascinated with her tragic manner and fluent language. "Well, young man," she continued, "I will tell you, for I love to speak about Burns. That is my house at the end of the brig there. Well, in Burns' time, a man lived in it o' the name o' Kemp, wha had a daughter ca'd Kate—Kate Kemp. Well, you know, Burns had an e'e to Kate, and came from Mauchline ae afternoon to see her, but it so happened that the coo was lost and she had gone to look for't. Well, you see, the poet made up his mind to go and look for them baith, but he had gotten no farther than the other side of the brig there when he met the miller. 'Well, Miller, what are you doing here?' said he. 'Deed,' said the miller, 'I was gaun to speer that question at you.'

‘Well, then,’ said Burns, ‘I was doon to see Kate Kemp, but she and the coo’s lost.’ Weel, ye ken, they cracket awa’, but Burns began to get fidgety an’ left the miller like a knotless thread, an’ gaed awa doon the holm there. But the next time they met he said, ‘Miller, I owe you an apology for leaving you so suddenly when we last met.’ ‘Oh, there’s nae need o’ that!’ said the miller, ‘for I suppose something was rinnin’ in your head.’ ‘You are right,’ said Burns, ‘and here it is;’ an’ sae wi’ that he read ‘Man was made to mourn.’ Yes, John, that is the Holm where Burns made ‘Man was made to mourn,’ I can assure you.” John heard her statement, intimated his surprise, and moved off, and left the old lady and I to ourselves. She informed me that she had spent the whole of her life in the locality, and entertained me with many reminiscences of her early years. “In the days of Burns,” she said, “aye, and in my day to,” she added with a sigh, “all round by the holm there was covered with beautiful trees in which the craws biggit their nests, but they are all down; and a beautiful oak that stood ’yont the road a bit, which was admired by everybody, and was drawn by many an artist, is down too. My heart bled to see the noble monarch lying low—but it was not so in the days of Lord Glenlee. No, he would not allow a tree on the estate to be touched, and when one at the big house was blown down, he said ‘if a ten pound note will put it up I will gladly pay down the money.’” After enjoying a hearty draught of milk in this intelligent lady’s dairy—which, by the by, is cut out of the solid rock—I reluctantly bade her good-bye and pushed on to Mauchline, for train time was nigh, and my step was not so elastic as it was in the morning. The scenery on the road between Barskimming bridge and Mauchline is romantic enough, but it is tame, tame, when compared with the wooded slopes of Ballochmyle. When I reached Mauchline station the train was due. It is needless to add that Kilmarnock was speedily and safely reached.

