

Scotland. He paid nine guineas for a steerage-passage; and was indeed in a fever to be off, as he had been called upon to give security for the maintenance of his offspring, and was in dread of imprisonment. He wrote a farewell poem to Ayrshire and to Scotland—"The gloomy night is gathering fast." However, the tardy compensation which he was hoping to make to Jean for the imprudence and trouble into which he had betrayed her was not at present allowed to take effect. Her parents were so indignant at the affair that they absolutely refused to hear of matrimony; and Jean consented to relinquish her lover's written declaration of marriage, and himself along with it. Burns meanwhile, regarding her as having flinched in love and faith before adverse circumstances, denounced and abjured her, and indemnified himself by making love to Mary Campbell, his "Highland Mary." The poet and his Mary plighted their troth with much fervour; but this episode in the history of his loves came to nothing, the damsel having very soon afterwards died of a fever at Greenock.

With everything prepared for his start to Jamaica, and expecting to remain away from Scotland for years, if not for the remainder of his life, the consciousness of his poetic gift worked upon the mind of Burns; he resolved to leave behind him some record that the fields and streams, the lasses and humours, of Ayrshire, had been all-sufficient and immortal inspiration to a quenchless genius. Encouraged by his landlord, Mr. Gavin Hamilton, he determined to publish a small volume of his verses. This came out accordingly in the autumn of 1786. The edition, printed at Kilmarnock, was of 600 copies, of which about 350 were subscribed for. "Halloween," "The Cotter's Saturday Night," and several other of his now celebrated productions, were included in the volume. The reader should refer to the preface, at once modest and distinct in self-assertion, with which the ploughman-poet introduced his verses. While indulging in gratuitous self-depreciation as compared with Allan Ramsay or Fergusson, "the author tells him (the possible critic) once for all that he certainly looks upon himself as possessed of some poetic abilities."

This was the crisis of Burns's life. The book was well received from the first, and cleared for its writer the small but acceptable sum of nearly £20. A letter came from Dr. Blacklock to a friend of Burns, which entirely overthrew the poet's Jamaican scheme, enlarged his practical views, and encouraged him to try his opportunities in Edinburgh. He arrived in the Scottish capital in November, 1786, without either acquaintances there or letters of introduction; but he soon got to know all sorts of leading people, whether in literature or in fashion and social rank, and surprised all by his brilliant conversational powers, though he was not forward in talking unless he had something substantial to say. His demeanour was worthy of his exceptional position in its complicated bearings; and he was above all the tricks of a man who is showing off, or allowing others to show him off. He spent two winters in Edinburgh, leaving the city finally in February, 1788; meanwhile, he had been visiting various other parts of Scotland, and had crossed the English Border to Newcastle and Carlisle. A new edition of his poems, under the patronage of Dugald Stewart and many other celebrities, had