

Murdoch, for a small salary, to teach their children. He taught them Arithmetic, Grammar, Latin and French. Robert he found to be quick of apprehension and not afraid to study when knowledge was the reward.

When Murdoch's term expired the father himself undertook the education of his children, teaching them after working hours. The reading of that household was wide, varied and unceasing. The books which Robert mentions as forming part of his reading besides ordinary school books are: Locke, "On the human understanding," Shakespeare, Thomson, Milton, Pope and Young. These books which fed his young intellect, were devoured only at intervals snatched from toil. In Robert's sixteenth year he says—"I first committed the *Æn* of Rhyme." In his case, as in the case of Sappho, it was love that taught him song. He further says, "You know our country custom of coupling man and woman as partners in the labor of the harvest. A bonnie, sweet, sonsie Lassie had been assigned mine. She sang sweetly, and the tones of her voice made my heart strings thrill like an *Æolian harp*." Her singing first gave him the thought of writing song. The first song he composed, he dedicated to her, it was entitled "Handsome Nell." Thus with him began poetry and love. Some time later he went to school at a distance from home to study mensuration and surveying. He made good progress in his studies until a charming young girl who lived near upset his trigonometry. "It was in vain," he says, to think of doing any more good at school."

This irresistible attraction towards what he calls the adorable half of the human species seemed destined to exert a constant and controlling influence upon his whole life. He says, "My heart was completely under and was eternally lighted by some Goddess or other." From this time for several years love-making was his chief amusement, or rather his most serious business. Towards the close of his 22nd year he first thought seriously of marrying, but the object of his love did not return his affections. To her was addressed his "Mary Morrison." In 1781 he went to Irvine, at that time the centre of the flax-dressing Art. Here he met and associated with smugglers and adventurers with whom the town swarmed. His sojourn there was short. Short though it was, it was fruitful of much ill. It was to him the descent to Avernus from which he never afterwards in the actual conduct of life escaped to breathe the pure upper air.

He returned home to find misfortunes deepening round the family and his father on his death-bed. Robert being the eldest, now stood at the head of the family. He gathered together all that misfortune and law had left and took a farm at Mossiel. Here again he was unsuccessful. The crops of two years failed, and their failure seems to have had something to do in driving him to fall back on his own internal resources. Here he seems to have awakened to the conviction that his destiny was to be a poet. He therefore set himself to work with great resolution to fulfil this mission.

The dawning hope began to gladden him, that he might one day take his place among the Bards of Scotland. He now conceived the idea of becoming a rational poet. From the autumn of 1784 to 1786, the fountains of poetry were unsealed and flowed forth in a continuous stream. That most prolific period saw not only the production of his satirical poems, but also of those characteristic epistles in which he reveals so much of his own character and of those other descriptive poems in which he so wonderfully delineates the habits and customs of the Scotch peasantry.

About the year 1785 he formed a *liaison* with Jean Armour, daughter of a respectable masterman of the village, whom he secretly married. The year following, her father's anger compelled Jean to give up her lover, and destroy the document that vouched

their marriage. The same year she became the mother of twin children. Maddened by Jean's desertion, Burns determined to leave Scotland. He resolved to go to Jamaica and become a slave-driver. Before going, however, he decided to have his poems published, to defray the expenses of the journey. They were accordingly published, and were so favorably received, that after all expenses were paid he cleared about £20. This success entirely changed his plans. Instead of going to Jamaica as he intended, he determined to go to Edinburgh and make the acquaintance of men of letters of the day. "The attentions he received there," says Dugald Stewart, "would have turned any head but his own." Here he was first introduced to James, Earl of Glencairn, who, ever afterwards befriended him, and on whose death a few years later he composed one of his most beautiful and pathetic elegies.

Throughout all he retained the same simplicity of manners that always characterized him; his dress was plain and unpretending. Invitations were now fairly raining on him. His company during the season of festivities was courted by all who wished to be considered either gay or polite. In fact he was lionized. In the spring of the same year, the ostensible object of his visit was attained,—the second edition of his poems appeared. This volume was published by subscription for the sole benefit of the author, and the subscribers were so numerous that the list covered thirty-eight pages. Nothing equal to the patronage that Burns at that time received had been since the days of Pope's *Iliad*. The proceeds of this made him the possessor of £500. This enabled him during the same year to make a border tour, at the close of which he made his way back to his friends at Mossiel. He had left them comparatively unknown, but returned to them with his poetical fame established, and the whole country ringing with his praise. After spending a short time at home he again returned to Edinburgh, and in a short while set out for a tour to the Northern Highlands. This tour produced little poetry, but what it did produce was of the best. In the autumn we again find him in Edinburgh. The object of his return was to obtain a settlement from Creech, the publisher, and while wasting time here waiting for the tardy publisher, he again fell under evil influences. As was to be expected, under those circumstances, his second winter here passed with less welcome and more frosty civility than the first. It must be confessed his associating with low companions had much to do with this. Besides, the gloss of novelty of the inspired "ploughman" had worn off; and the doors of the titled which had first opened so willingly now unclosed for him with a tardy courtesy, and he was seldom requested to repeat his visit.

He saw all this with a sinking heart, and decided to resume the plough. He left Edinburgh, returned to Ayrshire and married Jean Armour. He then took a lease of "Ellisland Farm," and after settling here he wrote his patron, the Earl of Glencairn, asking him to get him an appointment in the excise. This the Earl granted. This office paid him £50 a year, and he retained the position till his death. Fortune again smiled on him at Ellisland. He found the land fruitful, and the people intelligent. Here the muse again visited him. Ellisland first saw the production of the world-renowned poem "Tam O' Shanter" (which was the work of a single day). Here he also wrote that surprisingly beautiful and touching poem "Highland Mary." Here also was written his "Banks of Doon," and many other of his beautiful poems. For a while he seemed to prosper on the farm, but again fortune deserted him. We next find him beginning town life in Dumfries. From the day of his departure from Ellisland is dated his downward career. The cold neglect of his country had driven him back to the plough, and he hoped to gain from the furrowed field that independence which it was the duty of Scotland to have provided for him. But in this