

land-surveying, which has been dignified with the name of "practical mathematics." The whole amount of his tutoring, however, was inconsiderable. He read with interest and attention, as the scanty chance offered, the works of some poets—Pope and Ramsay, for instance; the *Spectator*, and a volume of letters by good writers.

Toil and moil was the early life of Burns—hard labour, and what is worse, anxious labour; the wolf was always at the door. A depression of spirits took possession of him, spite of a very ample share of youthful mirth and buoyancy, and darkened many hours of his later life. The family was very economical, and Burns, being as yet both thrifty and strictly temperate, in no way derogated from this creditable standard; there was no hired servant, and for years no butcher's meat in the house. Some time before the father's death, which occurred in February, 1784, Robert and his brother Gilbert took another farm, stocked from the hard-wrung savings of the household; the labour of the brothers was remunerated at the rate of £7 per annum each, and this plan continued for about four years. At another time Robert, loth to drudge on for ever as a mere labourer, tried a flax-dressing scheme in partnership at Irvine; but this soon proved abortive. When the father died, there remained, along with his widow, five children younger than Robert and Gilbert; the failure of a lawsuit with his landlord was just bringing a crash of ruin upon honest, hard-working William Burness, when death stepped in, and for him trouble was no more.

Robert was now full twenty-five years of age, and a man of great local popularity, and some note. He had shown an early susceptibility to the amorous passion. His first love, worth so calling, was at the age of fourteen; love summoned poetry to its aid, and he became a versifier. He was besides a fluent and vigorous talker; and his gifts were too bright and attractive to allow of his remaining long unknown in his own neighbourhood. Furiously loving the women, and loved by them in return (though it would appear that of real *de facto* amours he had no experience until his twenty-third year), received with acclaim wherever the men wanted to be lively, he took his fill of facile and unsettling pleasures. His habits became convivial, and all the more so after he had joined a society of freemasons. Still, he seems for a while to have exercised a tolerable amount of self-control as far as drinking is concerned. His brother, indeed, has left it on record that he did not remember in Robert any instance of positive intoxication until at a late date of his poetical career; and some other authorities will have it that, up to within the last few years of his life, when he had removed to Dumfries, he preserved a fair character for sobriety. His poetising for some years made no very noticeable progression; its more important developments are to be dated from about his twenty-fourth year.

Diffusive love-making has its mischances. One day, Burns found himself the prospective father of a brace of twins by his sweetheart Jean Armour, the daughter of a respectable master-mason. Roused to a lively sense of his responsibilities, he agreed with Jean that they should make a legal profession of antecedent marriage, thus legitimising the infants; and that he himself should then go off to Jamaica to try his fortune in the character of assistant overseer to a planter, seeing that nothing but penury appeared to be his destined lot in