

*December 27.*—Writes a remarkable letter to his father, in which he states that the weakness of his nerves has so debilitated his mind that he dares neither review past wants, nor look forward into futurity. He is quite transported at the thought that ere long, perhaps very soon, he shall bid adieu to all the pains, and uneasiness, and inquietudes of the weary life; for he is heartily tired of it, and, if he does not very much deceive himself, he could contentedly and gladly resign it. He concludes by saying, "My meal is nearly out, but I am going to borrow till I get more."

*December 31.*—His shop accidentally catches fire, as he is giving a welcome carousal to the new year and is burned to ashes, and, like a true poet, he is left without a sixpence.

1782. (23.)

The clouds of misfortune gather thick round his father's head; and he is visibly far gone in consumption. To crown the distresses of the poet, a *belle fille*, whom he adores, and who had pledged her soul to meet him in the field of matrimony, jilts him, with peculiar circumstances of mortification. His constitutional melancholy is now increased to such a degree that for three months he is in a state of mind scarcely to be envied by the hopeless wretches who have got their mittimus—*Depart from me, ye accursed!* He forms a friendship with a young fellow, a very noble character, but a hapless son of misfortune, whose mind was fraught with independence, magnanimity, and every manly virtue. He was the only man he ever saw who was a greater fool than himself, where woman was the presiding star; but he spoke of illicit love with the levity of a sailor, which hitherto he had regarded with horror. Here his friendship did him a mischief, and the consequences were, that soon after he resumed the plough, he wrote *The Poet's Welcome to his Illegitimate Child*. Meeting with

*Fergusson's Scottish Poems*, he strings anew his wildly-sounding lyre.

1783. (24.)

*April*—Commences his *Common Place Book*, entitled: "Observations, Hints, Songs, Scraps of Poetry, etc. By Robert Burness; a man who had little art in making money, and still less in keeping it."

*June 21.*—Writes to his cousin, James Burness, that his father is in a dying condition; and sends, probably for the last time in this world, his warmest wishes for his welfare and happiness. He becomes a Freemason, being his first introduction to the life of a boon companion.

1784. (25.)

*January*—Writes his "First Epistle to Davie, a Brother Poet," in which he alludes to his *Darling Jean*. The first idea of his becoming an Author started on this occasion.

*February 13.*—Death of his father; whose all went among the hellhounds that growl in the kennel of Justice. He makes shift to collect a little money in the family; and he and his brother Gilbert take the neighbouring farm of Mossiel, on which he enters with a full intention, *Come, go to, I will be wise*; reads farming books, calculates crops, attends markets; and, in spite of *the devil, the world, and the flesh*, he believes he would have been a wise man; but the first year, from unfortunately buying bad seed, the second from a late harvest, they lost half their crops. This upset all his wisdom, and he returns, *like the dog to his vomit, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire*. He now begins to be known in the neighbourhood as a maker of rhymes, and the first of his poetic offspring that saw the light was *The Holy Tulzie or Twa Herds*, a burlesque sham imitation of a quarrel between two reverend Calvinists, both of them *dramatis personæ* in his *Holy Fair*. *Holy Willie's Prayer* next