

He was born in December, 1804, in an old-fashioned cottage on the steep hill that rises up from the city side of the North-west Arm, a beautiful inlet of the sea that steals up from the entrance of the harbour for three or four miles into the land behind the city of Halifax. Burns tells us concerning his birth, that—

“a blast o’ Jan’war win’
Blew hansel in on Robin.”

Howe says of his first birthday, in poetry scarcely equal to that of Burns, even Nova Scotians being judges,—

“My first was stormy, wind north-west
The gathering snow-drifts piled;
But cosy was the mother’s breast
Where lay the new-born child.”

A “lawn with oak-trees round the edges,” a little garden and orchard with apple and cherry-trees, surrounded the home. Behind, sombre pine-groves shut it out from the world, and in front, at the foot of the hill-side, the cheery waters of the “Arm” ebbed and flowed in beauty. On the other side of the water, which is not much more than a quarter of a mile wide, rose knolls clothed with almost every variety of wood, and bare rocky hills, beautiful little bays sweeping round their feet, and quiet coves eating in here and there; while a vast country, covered with boulders and dotted with lovely lakes, stretched far beyond. Though the cottage was only two miles from Halifax, you might have fancied it “a lodge in some vast wilderness.” Here was “meet nurse” and food convenient for a poet. Amid these surroundings the boy grew up, and a love of nature grew with his growth. In after years he was never tired of praising the “Arm’s enchanted ground,” while for the Arm itself, his feelings were those of a lover for his mistress. Here’s a little picture he recalls to his sister Jane’s memory in after days—

“Not a cove but still retaineth
Wavelets that we loved of yore,

Lightly up the rock-weeds lifting,
Gently murmuring o’er the sand;
Like romping girls each other chasing,
Ever brilliant, ever shifting,
Interlaced and interlacing,
Till they sink upon the strand.”

In his boyish days he haunted these shores, giving to them every hour he could snatch from school or work. He became as fond of the water, and as much at home in it, as a fish. He loved the trees and the flowers, but naturally enough, as a healthy boy should, he loved swimming, rowing, skating, lobster-spearing by torch-light, or fishing, much more. He himself describes these years—

“The rod, the gun, the spear, the oar,
I plied by lake and sea—
Happy to swim from shore to shore,
Or rove the woodlands free.”

In the summer months he went to a school in the city, taught by a Mr. Bromley on Lancaster’s system. Boys and girls attended the same school, as I believe they always should, or why does nature put them together in families; and, very properly, the girls were taught every kind of needle-work, instead of the “logies. “What kind of a boy was Joe,” I asked an old lady who went to school with him sixty years ago. “Why, he was a regular dunce; he had a big nose, a big mouth, and a great big ugly head; and he used to chase me to death on my way home from school,” was her ready answer. It is easy to picture the eager, ugly, bright-eyed boy, fonder of a frolic with the girls than of Dilworth’s spelling-book. He never had a very handsome face; his features were not chiselled, and the mould was not Grecian. Face and features were Saxon; the eyes light blue, and full of kindly fun. In after years, when he filled and rounded out, he had a manly, open look, illumined always by sunlight for his friends, and a well-proportioned burly form, that well entitled him to the name of a man in Queen Elizabeth’s full sense of the word. And when his face glowed with the inspira-