

1775. (16.)

A collection of Songs his *vade mecum*—these he pores over, while driving his cart or walking to labour, song by song, verse by verse, carefully noting the true, tender, or sublime from affectation and fustian. To this practice he owes much of his critic craft. Hitherto he was, perhaps, the most ungainly, awkward boy in the parish—no *solitaire* less acquainted with the ways of the world.

1776. (17.)

He goes to a country dancing-school to give his manners a brush, strongly against the wish of his father, who was subject to strong passions, and, from that instance of disobedience, took a sort of dislike to him, which, he believes, was one cause of the apparent dissipation which marked his succeeding years—the great misfortune of his life was to want an aim—the only two openings by which he can enter the temple of fortune are the gate of niggardly economy, or the path of little chicaning bargain-making. A constitutional melancholy makes him fly solitude, and he becomes a welcome guest wherever he visits—his greatest impulse is *un penchant pour l'adorable moitié du genre humain*—his heart is completely tinder, and eternally lighted up by some goddess or other. At the plough, scythe, or reap-hook he fears no competitor, and spends his evenings after his own heart. His zeal, curiosity, and intrepid dexterity recommend him as a confidant in all love adventures, and he is in the secret of half the loves of the parish of Tarbolton.

1777. (18.)

May 25.—His father removes to the farm of Lochlen. The young poet composes the ballad, *My father was a farmer upon the Carrick border*, and the song—*It was upon a Lammas night*.

1778. (19.)

Spends his nineteenth summer on a smuggling coast, at a noted school in Kirkoswald, where he learns mensuration, surveying, dialling, etc., but makes a greater progress in the knowledge of mankind. He falls in occasionally with the smugglers, and learns to fill his glass and mix without fear in a drunken squabble, yet he goes on with a high hand with his geometry, till the sun enters Virgo, a month always a carnival in his bosom, when a charming *fillette*, who lives next door to the school, oversets all his trigonometry, and sets him off at a tangent from the sphere of his studies. Returns home considerably improved—engages several of his school-fellows to keep up a literary correspondence—pores over a collection of Letters of the Wits of Queen Anne's Reign.

1779. (20.)

*Vive l'amour, et vive la bagatelle*, his sole principles of action—*Tristram Shandy* and the *Man of Feeling*, his favourite books. Poetry the darling walk of his mind—usually half a dozen or more pieces on hand. His passions now rage like so many devils, till they find vent in rhyme. Composes *Winter, a dirge*, the eldest of his printed pieces—*The Death of Poor Mailie*, *John Barleycorn*, and several songs.

1780. (21.)

November.—Forms, in conjunction with Gilbert, and seven or eight young men, a Bachelors' Club, in Tarbolton, the rules of which he afterwards draws up—the declared objects are—relaxation from toil—the promotion of sociality and friendship, and the improvement of the mind.

1781. (22.)

Midsummer.—Partly through whim, and partly that he wishes to set about doing something in life, he joins a flax-dresser in Irvine, of the name of Peacock, a relation of his mother—where he spends six months learning the trade.