

operations, and he gave the farm up. It may indeed be surmised that, if his habits had been steady, and himself more faithful to the severe traditions of his father's life, if he had not allowed the jolly dogs and loose fishes of his neighbourhood to prey upon his leisure, and if he had not grown a more and more helpless slave of the devil of drink, he might have sufficed for both occupations. However that may be, he did not thus suffice; and we may well infer that things had come to a bad pass with the farm when Burns, having to make his option between that and a government stipend of £70 a year, chose the latter as the mainstay of his household. About the end of 1791, he removed to a small house in the town of Dumfries (how many thousands of people have looked since then with reverence on its mean outside!) and here he remained for the brief residue of his life.

Burns had a certain Jacobite and Tory tone of political sentiment; but every great and unprosperous genius, born in the lower ranks of society, is a potential democrat; and the era of the French Revolution was not one to leave the secret places of such a soul unstirred. More than once Burns used some expressions regarding the Revolution not strictly befitting an officer in the excise service of King George the Third—rather suitable to a man of genius and insight; this spoiled his prospects in the excise, and very nearly resulted in his dismissal. The chances open to his aspirations were that he might within a moderate number of years rise to the position of supervisor, with about £200 a year, any amount of hard work, and no leisure—and then, after another interval of years, to the post of collector at about £300 to £400. This latter promotion would have relieved him from the severer toils of business, and would have satisfied his desires. "A life of literary leisure, with a decent competence, is the summit of my wishes," he said in one of his letters. In fact, however, he never rose out of the ranks in the excise service.

The majority of the songs which Burns wrote subsequently to his first Edinburgh edition were sent to *Johnson's Scots Musical Museum*, published in that city, and at a later date, to the *Collection of Original Scottish Airs*, edited and published by Mr. George Thomson. In this work he wrote the words for many long-popular melodies—a field for the exercise of his genius which roused his heartiest and most generous sympathies. His first letter, replying to Mr. Thomson's application, is dated 16th September, 1792, and absolutely declines the offered payment. It gives one a salutary thrill to think of this great poet, oppressed with the cares of a family, drudging through a hard, uncongenial, and most scantily paid employment, the fineness of his nature obfuscated by drink, his strong frame beginning to feel the inroads of disease, yet rising superior to all low-hearted suggestions, and even to the perfectly reasonable and fair promptings of his position, and with a glorious burst of patriotic love refusing to be a penny the richer in pocket for the pure ore of everlasting song with which he again and again dowered his country. For about four years he adhered to his self-denying ordinance; and, in one instance when Mr. Thomson had of his own accord sent him a small sum, Burns—although, out of consideration for his correspondent, he did not send the money back—warned him never to repeat the experiment. At last, however, he was compelled