

Mary Morrison. The first three years at Lochlea were fairly prosperous. But on New Year's Day of 1782 their house was burnt, and in 1782 their father died. During this period his poetic genius began to display itself in such compositions as "John Barleycorn" (1782), the "Lament for Mailie" (1782), "Rigs o' Barley," "My Nannie, O," and "Green grow the rashes, O!" (1783). In these charming poems we have specimens of Burns's manifold genius—his love of nature, his devotion to women, his rich humor (here he is like Scott, and unlike his countrymen in general, who have a good deal of sharp wit but little humor), his remarkable power of expression, the simplicity, directness and richness of his thought and language.

IV. MOSSGIEL. 1784-1788 (Aetat. 25-29).

Burns and his brother Gilbert took the farm of Mossiel, which, like Lochlea, his previous residence, was near Mauchline—all in Ayrshire. This is often (and probably with truth) said to be the best period of Burns's life; since he was not only at this time characterized by temperance and frugality, but produced here some of his best work. It was here that he met Jean Armour, his future wife. It may be sufficient, in regard to their relations, to observe that a private Scotch marriage had been celebrated between them in 1785, which her parents managed (quite illegally) to annul in 1786. The reader should remember that the Scottish Church of the day, and the Presbyterian bodies generally, represented two different tendencies, the pietistic and the liberal. Gavin Hamilton, Burns's landlord, and the poet himself were on the side of the liberals. Neither school seems to have been quite satisfactory.

During this period Burns produced (1785) "Holy Willie's Prayer"—a composition of tremendous energy, if

not quite to be justified,—the "Holy Fair," the "Jolly Beggars," which Carlyle places in the very first rank of his poems—followed by Mrs. Oliphant. We admit the wonderful energy and versatility of these songs and verses, but we cannot put them before "Tam o' Shanter." "The Address to the Deil" is of the same year.

To the year 1786 belongs the somewhat-mysterious episode of "Highland Mary." Burns, disgusted at the conduct of Jean Armour's parents, gave himself up to this new flame—the only other in his life which seems to have been real and strong. He and Mary became betrothed on May 14, and intended emigration. Difficulties came in the way; but all were ended by her death from fever, October 12.

To the years 1785-6 belong the humorous poem "Death and Doctor Hornbrook," the delightful "Twa Dogs," the "Cotter's Saturday Night," the two "Epistles to Davie, a brither poet," "Hallowe'en," "To a Mouse," "To a Mountain Daisy." These poems alone would serve to immortalize any writer. The first epistle to Davie is in every way remarkable for its genuineness of sentiment, for its quick transition of thought, for its illustration of the manner in which Burns employs the languages of England and of Scotland to express different kinds of sentiment. The poems to the mouse and the mountain daisy are full of the tenderest feelings for all created beings.

All the poems named, with the exception of the "Jolly Beggars," appeared in Burns's first volume of poems, which was published in July, 1786; and took Scotland by storm. Of an edition of 600 copies only 41 were left at the end of a month, a very remarkable success when we consider the contracted area to which he appealed. Towards the end of this year he wrote the "Brigs of Ayr," and the "Lass of Ballochmyle."