

been published in Edinburgh in April, 1787; it consisted of 2,800 copies, for which a subscription-list of 1,500 names had been obtained, and it brought in nearly £600 to the poet. So far all was well. But Burns, already too convivial as an Ayrshire peasant, naturally grew still more convivial as the cynosure of social gatherings in Edinburgh; and the *éclat* and excitement of this episode in his history were not the natural precursors and props for a retired laborious country-life, in which hard field-work was again to be his means of subsistence, and the alleviator of his load was to be the rustic Jean Armour. The latter, it should be mentioned, presented her lover, in the spring of 1778, with a second pair of twins, who died almost immediately; for she and Burns had met again during one of the intervals of his Edinburgh sojourn, when her parents naturally courted his return. Her second frailty caused her exclusion from the paternal home; but some degree of reconciliation had been attained by the time of her delivery. Burns's enamoured correspondence with Mrs. M'Lehose (the "Clarinda" of his letters) was going on at its hottest about the same period.

In the early summer of 1788, Burns returned to Ayrshire. He espoused Jean by making a public declaration of marriage; liberally advanced £180 to his brother Gilbert, to give him a start in life; and took for himself a somewhat considerable farm at Ellisland in Dumfries-shire. Here he was domiciled before the end of June; and resumed, among other rural occupations, the exercise of his skill as a ploughman, at which (it is pleasant to learn) he was a capital hand. Soon, however, he found that his income needed eking out; and, as nothing more congenial offered as an outlet for his energies, he applied to be appointed excise-officer for his own vicinity, and obtained this post through the interest of Mr. Graham, of Fintray. His pay was at first the pittance of £50 per annum, increased after a time to £70.

Burns an exciseman is a rather dejecting picture to contemplate. Still, if we exclude idealisms and prejudices, and take a plain common-sense view of the practicalities of the case, it might seem that the peasant poet, married to his early sweetheart, who proved an affectionate wife; settled on a farm of his own, the management of which he understood; enthusiastically admired for his genius by his countrymen, from the noblest duke to the most tattered gaberlunzie; habitually writing short pieces which he could throw off rapidly athwart a pressure of occupations, and which he could readily get published at once in some form or other, thereby keeping his name and fame in ever fresh remembrance; and having a small settled income, from a government post, to fall back upon, was not, as human lots go, a person worthy of mere commiseration, and altogether battered by the Fates. We hear of his having two men and two women-servants; nine or ten milch-cows; some young cattle; four horses; and several pet sheep, of which he was fond. The position looks like an endurable one to begin with, and likely to continue in a steady course of quiet progressive improvement. Unfortunately this was not to be. The centre of Burns's hopes of material comfort and independence was his farm; but, after he had been there about three years and a half, he found that his duties in the excise interfered with the satisfactory conduct of agricultural