

stories, which had been handed down by tradition, and which it was at that time the fashion of the learned everywhere to collect and to grow enthusiastic over. Burns, who was to become the greatest *folk-poet* of the world, was born at the proper time to take advantage of the wave of popularity that was just being showered upon the *indigenous* poetry of every nation, and we have evidences in his own works, that he, like the Germans, had fallen under the influence of the Ossian. Reading of works on grammar, Scottish history and poetry, English and Scotch, made up what must have been an *inspiring* and *kindling* education to the boy, and we know that his first attack of love, at fourteen, proved the occasion for attempts at rhyming.

Although he worked hard on his father's farm, and also for himself, yet he was not a success, and driven to desperation by one trouble after another, he resolved to quit Scotland and go to Jamaica. This was in 1786. To procure passage-money he published the first or Kilmarnock edition of his poems, now so rare and costly. The success of the venture, and the persuasion of the friends thus won led him to abandon the voyage, and to try a second edition in Edinburgh. Had it not been for the full measure of that Scotch virtue, common sense, which the poet possessed, his head might have been turned by the welcome he received. It speaks well for his inborn manliness and nobility of heart, that he could preserve at all times proper decorum, and many of the friends he then made were his for his life time. Out of the proceeds of the second edition he generously gave about £200 to his brother Gilbert, and with the rest began to stock a farm for himself at Ellisland. In 1788 he married Jean Armour, who had loved him but too well, and some of his best love-songs describe his content with a sweetheart who proved a very faithful and devoted wife. To eke out the income from the farm he obtained an appointment as exciseman, finally giving up the farm, moving into Dumfries, and depending upon his official post for a living. He might have been very comfortable had he not been too independent to accept pay for the poems he was all the while contributing to Johnson's and Thomson's collections of Scottish songs. Habits of tippling had in the meantime been growing on him, and his affairs generally had been going from bad to worse. It is no wonder then that his constitution could not stand the strain, and the final result was a rheumatic fever which carried him off on the morning of July 21, 1796.

He had lived only 37 years, but in that time and under all the adverse circumstances, he had proved to the world his right to the title of king of lyric poets, chief of the world's folk-singers.

The direct line of succession in Scottish song is Allan Ramsay, Robert Fergusson, and Robert Burns, and to his two predecessors, and especially to Fergusson, the last and greatest acknowledges his indebtedness. The work of Burns falls into two divisions, viz.: that up to 1786 and the work subsequent to that date and up to his death. This latter is mainly his remodelling of the old folk-songs, which were published in Johnson's "Scots' Musical Museum" and in Thomson's "Collection of Original Scottish Airs."

When we remember that one of the first books put into the hands of the poet when a boy had been a "Life of the Patriot Wallace," we cannot be surprised that among his patriotic songs,

"Scots wha hae wi' Wallace bled,"

should hold very high rank. Love of Scotland, of fatherland, which is such a strong element in Scottish character, was one of the chief springs of inspiration to poetic production in Burns. Though a Jacobin by report, and though at the beginning of the French Revolution he, like the advanced singers of almost every country, sympathised with the idealistic aims of the revolutionists, yet, in common with many others, he was horrified at their excesses, and it needed only the threat of an invasion to kindle the spark of latent patriotism and produce the loyal song:

Does haughty Gaul invasion threat?
Then let the loons beware, sir,
There's wooden walls upon our seas,
And volunteers on shore, sir.
The Nith shall run to Corsincon,
And Criffel sink in olway,
Ere we permit a foreign foe
On British ground to rally.

Another patriotic song is that beginning:

"Farewell, thou fair day, thou green earth and ye skies,
Now gay with the broad setting sun!"

—a scene of death on the evening after a battle.

Friendship was another of the inspirations of Burns' work.

"Should old acquaintance be forgot
An' never brought to min—"

Many a line testifies of his fidelity to any and all who had ever done him any kindness. A very fine example is his "Elegy on Captain Matthew Henderson," which has some very fine stanzas, though the two introductory ones are not up to the level of the others. Another instance is the very fine lament for James, Earl of Glencairn, the last stanza of which runs as follows:

"The bridegroom may forget the bride
Was made his wedded wife yestreen;
The monarch may forget the crown
That on his head an hour has been;
The mother may forget the child
That smiles sae sweetly on her knee;
But I'll remember thee, Glencairn,
And a' that thou hast done for me!"

It is rather surprising that one who loved convivial company so much did not leave more drinking songs. Of course,

"O Willie brew'd a peck of maut,"

will always be thought of first and is easily the best. "John Barleycorn" and "Scotch Drink" also sing the praises of the Scotchman's beverage, but they are not so much songs as ballads or odes.

A third spring of production in Burns was his love of independence, the most famous expression of which is "For a' that and a' that."

"The rank is but the guinea stamp;
The man's the gowd for a' that."

Compare with this his "Inscription for an Altar to Independence:"

"Thou of an independent mind
With soul resolved, with soul resigned,
Prepared Power's proudest frown to brave,
Who wilt not be, nor have a slave,
Virtue alone who dost revere,
Thy own reproach alone dost fear,
Approach this shrine and worship here."

This spirit of independence has always been a great claim to our sympathy, nor did it matter to him whether he felt called upon to exercise it in politics or religion. Naturally of a deeply religious temperament, he did not hesitate to scourge hypocrisy in the orthodox clergy, as witness "The Holy Fair" and "Holy Willie's Prayer." Of course, he came under the ban, but little did he care for that.

But the greatest theme of which Burns sings, the whole gamut of which he can strike, and strike into grand harmony, is the passion of love, and of love in all its phases. And here we meet with such prodigality of wealth that it is very difficult to make a selection. Never has a wife been praised more divinely than in the song, "I love my Jean."

"Of a' the airts the wind can blow,
I dearly like the west,
For there the bonnie lassie lives,
The lassie I lo'e best;
There wild woods grow, and rivers row,
And mony a hill between;
But day and night my fancy's flight
Is ever wi' my Jean."

No absent mistress was ever pined for as in the song, "My Nannie's Awa'." The flirt is beaten in "Last May a Braw Wooer," but the deadly darts from "Twa Lovely Eens of Bonnie Blue" are delightfully described in "The Blue-eyed Lassie," and the desolation of soul caused by a lover's faithlessness has never been better described than in the "Banks of Doon." How can the joy of a lovers' meeting be better told than in "My Nannie, O," the delight in stolen kisses is incomparable in "Coming Thro' the Rye," the "Henpecked Husband" has the poet's commiseration, but the good faithful wife is above all praise. But how shall we speak of those wonderful compositions, "Highland Mary" and "To Mary in Heaven?" It would seem as if a guardian angel had taken on human form as Mary Campbell, and that the solemn pledging of troth in the little stream had been but a prelude to her swift departure to her first home. The won-