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ROBERT
BURNS
—
EDWARD
WINSLOW
GILLIAM
The Cornhill Company





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ROBERT BURNS

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A Drama in Four Acts

EDWARD WINSLOW GILLIAM

*Author of "The Rector of Hazlehurst"
"The Foundling," etc.*



THE CORNHILL COMPANY

BOSTON

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A FOREWORD

Robert Burns — Born January 25, 1757; died July 21, 1796.
A great, but ill-fated genius. Author of his own beautiful
epitaph:

Is there a whim-inspiréd fool,
Owre fast for thought, owre hot for rule,
Owre blate to seek, owre proud to snool?
 Let him draw near,
And owre this grassy heap sing dool,
 And drap a tear.

Is there a bard of rustic song,
Who, noteless, steals the crowds among,
That weekly this area throng?
 O pass not by!
But, with a frater feeling strong,
 Here heave a sigh.

Is there a man, whose judgment clear
Can others teach the course to steer,
Yet runs himself life's mad career,
 Wild as the wave?
Here pause, and, through the starting tear,
 Survey this grave.

The poor inhabitant below
Was quick to learn, and wise to know,
And keenly felt the friendly glow,
 And softer flame;
But thoughtless follies laid him low,
 And stained his name.

Reader, attend: Whether thy soul
 Soars fancy's flights beyond the pole,
 Or, darkling, grubs this earthly hole
 In low pursuit,
 Know: *Prudent, cautious, self-control*
 Is wisdom's root!

More than one play, we learn, presenting Robert Burns, have been produced in Scotland, but with indifferent success. The reasons given are the unhappy incidents in the life of the Bard, and his unseemly and lamentable end.

But these distressing features belong to the pen of the biographer, who must needs present the Bard in his totality, not to that of the dramatist, who rather selects, in his career, an illustrative point of distinction. The author, therefore, has chosen, for the final and crowning scene, the plowman Poet's brilliant advent among the wits and bloods of Edinburgh, declared by Sir Walter Scott the most remarkable event in the annals of literature — the scene in the Edinburgh salon of the Duchess of Gordon — a scene representative of the Bard's world-wide triumph.

The Drama is a life of Burns, set dramatically. Nothing artificial. A real life. The leading events of his career are drawn, historically correct, and substantially in historic sequence. An occasional unimportant bit of dramatic license will, we hope, be allowed.

The author himself somewhat of a Scotchman (by remote extraction), the Drama, in the sum of its changes, has been the enthusiastic work of half a dozen years.

Apart from the direct quotations the Drama is replete, it is hoped, with a Burns' atmosphere.

The reader will note many indirect quotations, where the marks are not and could not be given, seeing the context required the author to introduce a word or sentence of his

own. Noticeable in takings from Tam O'Shanter, and other pieces.

The temper of the Pastors, in Act II, is not overdrawn. They meet to concert measures against Burns, whose fulminations had lampooned them unmercifully. At that day the hold of Calvinism in West Scotland was disputed by Arminianism and Socinianism. The Kirk was divided into warring factions, known respectively as Old Lights, and New Lights — high Calvinists, on the one hand, and, on the other, "Moderates," supposed to squint toward Arminianism. Between these factions the quarrel was bitter, and the country-side half mad over it.

The public appearance of Burns on the scene, as the champion of the New Lights, intensified the quarrel tremendously. The few written-out pieces of the "Rustic Bard," in the plowman's cramped hand (as shown in fac-similes), distributed to his friends — among the pieces shafts at the Old Lights — had aroused great interest. When it became known his poems were passing through the Kilmarnock press, interest mounted. The booklet appeared. To Ayrshire it was a revelation.

In the Kirk circles, excitement rose to fever-heat. Burns was the central figure. He had taken risks. The scathing satire in "The Kirk's Alarm" — unequalled for severity — let fly both at the Old Light Pastors personally, and at their doctrine in controversy, these Pastors being at the front among the distinguished men of their communities — at a critical hour, too, when these Pastors were profoundly aroused over a bitter quarrel with the New Light party, a quarrel involving the congregations, and, in fact, all West Scotland — for a young country-side plowman to let fly arrows so sharp at such parties, was, antecedently, exceedingly hazardous. It was a situation our day scarcely can realize.

Burns saw the risk and boldly dared it. Fortune favors

the brave. The Bard's fulminations, now out in plain print, and snapped up and jollified over by the public, the New Lights received with roars — the Old Lights, with wrath and alarm.

The affiliated Old Light Pastors of the Mauchline district (the Bard's residence,) meet, in Act II, in anti-Burns Session. Divisions among themselves spring up. Some, while denouncing the fulminations, applaud their genius, Scotch pride insinuating itself into kirk loyalty. Hence suspicions. Hence the *breeze* between Reverends Peebles and Russell, as given in the Drama.

The plot fallen upon is to entrap and imprison Burns, upon warrant connected with his relations with his sweetheart, Jean Armour, in the hope that his well-known extreme sensitiveness would work a jail suicide; Burns counter-planning in an effort to foil his enemies by embarking for the West Indies.

We all know Burns' failings, and the lamentable issue of his life. With this the Drama has naught to do. As among the remarkable men of the world — as the most remarkable, perhaps, of his day — as a great national Poet, with patriotic societies in every city organized around him — as one of the great poets — as the Poet of the plain people and of democracy — as an extraordinary genius — and as, in his writings, a living delight among all English speaking peoples — he is here presented in his notable triumph in the salon of the Duchess of Gordon, eclipsing, within his range of subjects, the wits and bloods of the Capital greeting him there — a star of magnitude, whose shining grows with the generations.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

ROBERT BURNS — *alias* Nannie Brice, *alias* Andrew Cargill.

GILBERT BURNS.

JEAN ARMOUR.

JOHNNIE PEACOCK, Bailiff.

DAVID BRICE.

OLD LIGHT PASTORS — in meeting.

DUCHESS OF GORDON and company in her Edinburgh
Salon.

ACT I

ROBERT BURNS

ACT I

Scene: Evening. A barn-yard. DAVID BRICE discovered, with lantern. Enter ROBERT BURNS. He is seen a singularly attractive young countryman. Clothes of plowman — soiled and disordered by circumstances of pursuit. Broad blue bonnet covers head. Visage haggard — showing all the passions of soul in commotion. He rushes in, wildly excited.

BRICE (*lifting lantern, to scrutinize*): Jee, jee! Robie Burns?

ROBIN: Ay, Davie Brice — fugitive frae your brither Willie's hay-loft — wi' bailiff at my heels to serve warrant for ten pounds, or Robin's proud and independent stomach to rave in jail! Lord of grace and power, help the helpless!

BRICE: Does bailiff follow on here?

ROBIN: Not yet at Willie's has been the coof — but be reported hot on the way thither.

Ten pounds, Davie, when my pouch be a baubee, and I must skulk frae covert to covert, till Greenock clears her West Indies brigantine, and frae a berth afore the mast say fareweel to a' sae dear! God of mercy befriend the friendless!

BRICE: But no fareweel for aye, Robin — na, na. Ye'll be back a year and a day, wi' fortune mended, clouds blawn aff, and arms and hearts wide to receive ye.

ROBIN (*intense*): Fortune mended! Alas! Davie, misfortune stares my face, pointing to ruin and disgrace. Fareweel

to Scotland, to dear auld Scotland, fareweel, fareweel!
(Pause — grief demonstrations.)

And to you, too, my bonnie Jean, must I say fareweel?
 What bursting anguish tears my heart!—Jean, Jean, Jean,
 what lover ever sae adored? I thought mysel' the lucki-
 est lad! How can she frae the fondest lover part?

(Pause — grief demonstrations.)

ROBIN: If that ten pounds, by parish law, be for the child
 unborn, can it be called impure? Didna I gie her full
 written acknowledgment — held, in our degree, to cover
 a' the ground, legal and moral — to be, by formal mar-
 riage, ratified on my return? Wretched, wretched wo-
 man, she has destroyed it, I hear. — Deil tak me, but yet
 I do love the jade!

(Intensely aroused — wild action.)

BRICE: Come, Robin, come. You're worn, and wild, and
 stricken. Come, tak the hay, as chance offers. They've
 hunted you out of rest night and day. You'll soon be far
 a-sea, headin' for better times, and cheatin' jail. Ay, ay,
 Robin, the hour looks dark, but ye'll yet toss your tail
 and cock your horns fu' canty. If need be, my whistle
(blows whistle) will report the bailiff.

*(By outside ladder Robin mounts to loft. Brice busies him-
 self within barn. Comes out. Stands in thought. Sud-
 denly looks up at loft, intently listening, Reassured as to
 sound, speaks):*

BRICE: Naithing, naithing. Just a turn a-bed. Asleep, poor
 hounded soul, as he touches the hay.

(Enter Jean Armour, a winsome lassie.)

BRICE: Wow! Jean Armour! What's up, to be at such a
 place, and at such an hour?

JEAN *(heart-stricken — intense)*: I must see Robin. Hidin'
 here, the cot-house tells me. Up there *(pointing to loft)*?

BRICE: Sure as we're down here.

JEAN: Ay, David Brice, I must see Robin — *must* see him, David Brice — I must see him afore he leaves. My heart's breakin'.

BRICE: And Robin's, as weel. The cut of the marriage lines in his acknowledgment, has cut Robin's veins.

(*Jean bursts into tears.*)

(*Pause.*)

JEAN (*passionately*): Oh! Davie, Davie, are you na my kin and my friend? You know a' my trouble, and I know verra' weel you bear nae flinty heart that canna feel. Sair did I weep and mickle did I say. As you wot, my father, enraged, did sae bear down on me, and, at his order, the lawyer-man did cut the lines.

(*Weeps. Pause.*)

JEAN: Oh! I hae wronged Robin, and I hae wronged mysel'. All this I must tell Robin afore he leaves Scotland.

(*Pause.*)

And him sae dear to me I must warn against this bailiff-man; for this verra' hour sure and certain news reaches me — and sae, too, hae I come — that some coof has given Robin awa', and bailiff-man be now on his track to *Brice's barn* — yours, or Willie's. (*Pause.*)

And besides, I wad press Robin for anither acknowledgment, and he wad know that father and mither and a' should gae mad afore a cut again.

All this wad I tell Robin, to hear him say he forgives me, and that he loves me. How can he break a heart that keeps him in its core?

(*Weeps. Pause.*)

BRICE: I can speak for Robin, Jean, that he loves you still.

JEAN (*joyfully*): Ha! Has he told you sae?

BRICE: Have na I heard his heart distractions?

JEAN (*imploringly*): Oh! David Brice, for the Lord's sake, let *me* hear his distractions. I beseech, I implore, by

these tears, by my ain distractions. Oh! shall I see his face again, and shall I hear him speak? Oh! shall I hear him say, afore he goes awa', that *he loves me?*

(*Pause — Jean reflecting.*)

JEAN: He canna sleep here, Davie, for that bailiff-man. Call him down, Davie, call him down. He *must* come down. He canna sleep here for the bailiff-man; and Oh! Davie, told to you, at least let me, aback that door (*pointing to barn-door*), hear his dear distractions, and that he forgives me and loves me still.

(*Pause — Brice reflecting.*)

BRICE: They hae deeply wronged you, Jean, wha should hae been first to know better, and the turn you ask, you shall have. This (*showing whistle*) gives the signal. Stand, then, aback the door. The first whistle calls Robin. The second, mind, swings the door wide.

(*Jean retires behind door. Brice gives keen whistle. Robin, by outside ladder, hurries from loft.*)

ROBIN (*bitterly*): Losh, man! in God's name what now, what now? Anither flight this night?

BRICE: Hurry news up at the cot-house, that the bailiff has a tip you're hidin' here, and he may happen ony moment.

ROBIN (*bitter demonstrations*): By the Eternal! Nae end to this houndin'?

BRICE: We'll test the turn, Robin, and you may sleep here yet. The cot-house stands guard, and you'll hae time to gie bailiff the slip.

ROBIN: The Lord stand wi' the hapless! Amen, amen! — And whence this hurry news?

BRICE: The love of Jean Armour.

ROBIN (*astonished*): Ha! — What! — Jean Armour! — Lingers there ae kindly thought for Robin? (*Pauses*) Perdition seize me, but I do love her!

BRICE: And Jean loves Robin.

ROBIN (*furiously*): And here, thou son of assertion, be the argument: She came to my arms joyful and broad awake. What has she done? Has she na cut the marriage lines, sinking hersel' to Jezabel, and hurrying me skulkin' frae covert to covert, to dodge the jail, till I can ship, by slip, for Jamaica?

BRICE: Robin, Robin, pity the repenting, unhappy girl, and charge a father's forcing.

ROBIN: Lord, man! shouldna a fair name's keeping have braved him?

BRICE: She be ready now, I trow, to brave him.

ROBIN: How wot ye?

BRICE: Wad ye try her wi' anither acknowledgment?

ROBIN (*hesitating — then resolutely*): She has overstepped the mark. My poor, dear, misguided Jean! Davie, Davie, she has made me completely miserable. Never man loved a woman more than I did her — and, to confess a truth atween us, after a' I do love her to distraction. In a' my soul ne'er has there been place to let a rival in. Whan she wad look kindly upon anither, or whisper, did na a draught of damnation cut through me? I can hae nae nearer idea of the place of eternal torment, than what I have felt in my ain breast on her account. My pains of hell on earth are past, and shallna the bliss above be mine? Aft hae I tried to forget her. I hae run into a' kinds of dissipation and riots, mason meetings, drinking matches, and other mischief, to drive her out of my heart — but a' in vain. And now for a grand cure. The ship to tak me out to Jamaica, is to clear this week, at Greenock — and then fareweel, fareweel, fareweel to dear auld Scotland! (*Grief demonstrations.*)

BRICE: It's breakin' mony hearts, Robin, to hear you speak sae, and Jean's, believe me, be among them.

ROBIN (*furiously*): That acknowledgment, as a most precious document, at a' hazards she should hae preserved intact. And now they hae gat a warrant to throw me into jail, till I find security, for a great sum, against the unborn. They thought to keep it a close secret; but I gat it by a channel they little wot of, and, pursued by them, I am lying in ambush frae one's friend's hame to anither, and, like a true son of the Gospel, hae na whare to lay my head. Let them spare the poor, ill-advised girl; but may a' the furies that rend the injured lover's bosom, vex, till the latest hour, those wha controlled and misguided her. I am in a rage, Davie, reflecting on my miserable situation — exiled, abandoned, forlorn!

BRICE: Eleventh hour, Robin, hasna struck.

ROBIN: Davie, Davie, for me nae turn, nae balm in Gilead. I am miserable beyond compare, and Jean Armour's at the bottom. I am absolutely crazed, the luckless victim of mad tornadoes that blow me into chaos. Almighty love still reigns and revels in my bosom, that witchin' charm which can the strongest quell, the sternest move. This lassie I adored, and without her still feel in my heart a miserable void. Shouldna I know how charming she is, though a' Scotland were blind? Am I to be told by ony man, or ony nation upon earth, what beauty and sweetness are? Is she na the fairest whare thousands are fair? Wha sings my sangs wi' such taste and feeling? Whare such a voice — the song of the morning? Disna the sun tak delight to shine for her sake? Wad to God my tongue were a beam of the sun, to speak her — *her*, Davie, wha is entwined wi' the thread of my life!

(*Intense emotional demonstration.*)

(*Pause.*)

ROBIN: Since this affair, Davie, even in the hour of social mirth my gaiety has been the madness of an intoxicated

criminal under the hand of the executioner. Never more, never, NEVER shall I hae such an armful of joy.

BRICE: My magic whistle, Robin, will see to that.

(Brice blows a keen whistle. Barn-door swings open. The winsome Jean confronts Robin. With cries and tears they rush into each other's arms — Manifestations of intense feeling throughout.)

JEAN: Oh! Robin, Robin, Robin, about that acknowledgment, sair did I weep, and —

ROBIN *(interrupting)*: Davie has been eloquent, Jean. The heavens open, my dear girl, and the glorious light scatters a' the darkness of the past.

JEAN *(in tears of joy)*: O Robin, Robin!

ROBIN: Awa', awa', wi' hint of tears in a' this depth and tumult of joy.

JEAN: O Robin, they be tears of joy.

ROBIN: Then my lips must dry the trail upon the cheek and be partaker *(pressing Jean to his breast and kissing her)*.

JEAN: And you must gie me, Robin, anither acknowledgment.

ROBIN: On the spot, my ain duplicate *(disengaging himself and handing Jean the document)*.

JEAN: Oh! Robin, Robin, they curb me sair and hold me down, but I'll teach them a' rattling sang. Hearest thou, Robin, here's my hand *(extending hand which Robin grasps)* — *I'm thine by a' this paper reads.*

ROBIN: Heaven hears that vow, and, since you're na sae swift to seal it, I'll seal it mysel'. *(Embrace and shower of kisses.)*

JEAN: Oh Robin! but must you gang awa'?

ROBIN: The fates, it seems, sae order, and what ties, what ties broken!

JEAN: Na broken, Robin — but stretched and tried. You'll be back, Robin, whan it's a' blawn over, and gat richer.

ROBIN: Gat richer!

JEAN: Yes, Robin, dinna ye mean that?

ROBIN: In part — ay, ay.

JEAN: And isna the Indies a fortune makin' country?

ROBIN: Sae reported.

JEAN: And fortunes made there?

ROBIN: Sae reported.

JEAN: And winna Robin make his?

ROBIN: Enough may be, to the fair to hie, a bunch of blue ribbon to buy, to tie up my love's bonny brown hair.

JEAN: And riches truly that will be, Robin, for a token to no be forgotten.

ROBIN: What more in his pouch Robin canna say; for the gift no be his to gather or to garner gear. Onyhow, my dear, dinna lese ye on gold. It rises frae the hard, hard rock, and sae often finds a cruel bed, falling on the human heart, to break it.

JEAN: Certes, Robin, witnesses a-plenty.

ROBIN: Gold! What care I? Jean is my ain, and, Fortune, what more canst thou gie me? Kings and nations avaunt, awa', awa'! Trifles, I refuse ye, wi' Jeanie in my arms!
(*Embraces Jean.*)

JEAN: Heaven be praised for Robin, a lover and a lad complete. Na, na, Robin. What's a' the joys that gold can gie? I carena gear a single flea. The lad I love is the lad for me.

ROBIN: A country lad is his degree, but prouder than belted knight is he. Wi' Jean his ain he'll no envy the folks wha dwell aboon the sky.

(*Embraces Jean.*)

JEAN: Just ae inch of time I hae, Robin, afore the bailiff-man, to say fareweel. You'll no forget me, Robin, in the far Indies? The Powers above know sae weel the vows hae passed atween us twa.

ROBIN: Forget thee! Na, na! The dear idea refuses to be forgotten. Doesna the keen, tender ee declare the faithful lover? I ask for dearest life alone, that I may live to love thee. Forget thee! Let the sun, then, first forget his course. Let the monarch, then, first forget the crown, that on his head an hour has been. Till clay-cold death shall blind my ee, thou shalt be my dearie. Heaven hears the vow. On these lips I seal it, and break it shall I never.
(*Embraces Jean.*)

ROBIN: But can Robin forget, that distance has its dangers? Will Jean forget Robin?

JEAN: Forget Robin! All the lee lang day I couldna sing, I couldna say, how much, how dear I love Robin. Forget Robin! Hey Robin! the tear of *joy* comes to my ee, that the dearest lad has said he loves me. Forget Robin! Oh Robin! the tear of *fear* comes to my ee, whan I think on him wha's to be sae far awa'. Forget Robin! O! I'll think of him that's far away, and the lee-lang day I'll weep and pray for Robin back.

ROBIN: Those prospect tears cry out for advance returns.
(*Embraces Jean.*)

JEAN: O Robin! I'll storm heaven. O Robin! I'll weep and pray, and night and day in a' my dear petitions place his weal that's far away.

ROBIN: And for rich returns wha can doubt, whan this dear girl has grace enough to stock twa three preachers?

JEAN: O Robin! nightly dreams and thoughts by day will be wi' him that's far away. Tender spirits round my pillow will whisper the dear lad that's far away.
(*Robin embraces Jean.*)

JEAN: But, Robin, is it that you really are to be sae far away? It may na be; but, whare e'er you be, what e'er betides, Robin's to be a credit to us a' — we'll a' be proud of Robin.

ROBIN: Possibly my poetry may outlive my poverty and obscurity, and Robin na be forgotten a hindred years hence.

JEAN: And today, *today*, Robin is to be somebody. You know, Robin, my veins run Highland blood, whare Second Sight has a hame, and your grand day, Robin, is coming. *Whan*, I canna say. *Whare*, I canna say — but *somewhere*; for hae I na seen it? Yestreen on Robin I was dwelling, and suddenly, as by some hand na seen and which I couldna control, my eyelids were sae strangely raised, to see afar, and, staring out, I saw in such light and magnificence a grand company of nobles and ladies gay, and you, Robin, the star amang them a', and mysel', Robin, by your side in sang. Can a' this, Robin, be in far away Indies?

ROBIN: Ha! A heavenly vision! O glorious prophecy! Aweel, some clouds hae silver linings, and a loving brush has painted mine. The glory, sure, will be twa times more wi' the prophetess partaking. You raise me to the skies, dear girl. Now, wha be this imp frae below, 'gainst whom your guided step comes hither to gie me warning?

JEAN: Peacock is his name and stranger amang us — a wee scholar-man wha has seen better days, wi' short body, lang tongue, one sharp ee, keen sense, and head fu' of queer knowledge. Follows antiquarian trade — sae they call it.

(Enter rustic in tumult of excitement, arms up and exclaiming):

RUSTIC: A wee man wi' one ee be just up at the cot-house, and wow! they hurry me down here a-runnin'.

BRICE: The bailiff! And the Peacock canna forget the barn — old acquaintances.

ROBIN *(starting in haste to get away and embracing Jean)*: Fareweel, fareweel, my dearie. Whare e'er I be your dear idea shall mingle wi' every throb of my heart.

JEAN: But oh! Robin, the bailiff, sae I hear, has a cruel hound, to track you.

ROBIN (*reflecting a moment — then, resolutely*): I'll meet the unco loon. Whare I shall shelter against them I canna say. But shall I no weather the storm? Ay, ay, *I shall!* I'll be ship a-hull, wi' sails furled, helm lashed on lee side, and protected. This wot ye a' whom it concerns: I, Rhymer Robin, *alias* Burns, upon that proposition kiss the book. Perish the drop of blood of mine that fears them. I'll laugh and sing and shake my leg (*nervous gaiety*). Here, Jean, our longitudes and latitudes are close akin, and necessity knows nae law save its ain. Don me wi' headgear, waist and skirt.

(*In a jiffy Jean's things are off, and on upon Robin.*)

BRICE (*surveying Robin and laughing*): Na sae bad in woman's toggery.

ROBIN: Let it inspire me wi' a woman's tongue.

BRICE: Be a lover jilted by the Bard. Weep — wring hands — raise eyes — speak daggers — offer for the hunt — *ony thing, ony thing*, to get him aff.

ROBIN: *Nannie Brice* is up to snuff. (*Listening*) There! Footfalls! (*To Brice*) The lantern! You and Jean, aback the door, can hear *Nannie* acquit hersel'.

(*Exeunt Jean and Brice to barn.*)

(*Enter Peacock with lantern.*)

ROBIN (*Affrighted — out-cry*): Ha! Wha be ye?

PEACOCK (*lively — pert*): Nae robber, nae robber. Be no affrighted. And wha be *ye*? How shall I name ye? Be it lass, or be it dame ye?

ROBIN: Wha be ye — at such a place, and such an hour?

PEACOCK: Bailiff-man, law-and-order man, protection man, nae robber man, and on a hunt.

ROBIN: Good Lord! At the barn? For what? To find a goat for sin offering?

PEACOCK: Na, na, na — to find a man, nae goat; but this lucky dog finds a petticoat, wha wad prove, I opine, one offering sae fine at beauty's court, I dinna doubt.

ROBIN: Let bailiff-man beware, and wi' a serious proposition grapple. She might prove anither Eve, to gie ye an apple.

PEACOCK: It be, then, for my ainsel' to be affrighted.

ROBIN: Betak', then, thine ainsel' awa'.

PEACOCK: Na, na, na sae soon. The quarry's caught (*pointing to loft*), and hunter may dally. — And as for anither apple-Eve, egad! he might na bite.

ROBIN: Wiser in this old sun-set generation, than Father Adam at sun-rise creation.

PEACOCK: Ay, ay!

ROBIN: If law-man, whare thy badge of authority?

PEACOCK: Here, here (*pointing to badge and lifting lantern to it.*) — And my name is Peacock, Johnnie Peacock, easy for the goddess of the barn to remember.

ROBIN: Goddess of the *barn-yard*, sir, to speak to the point more completely, whare peacocks, wi' her cattle, roost, and sing sae sweetly.

PEACOCK: Sing sae sweetly! Ha, ha, ha! — And how name ye? Be it lass, or be it dame ye? To tak' a lovely look will ye blame me? Certes, it canna shame ye.

(To scrutinize, Peacock raises lantern near Robin's face. Robin, as if himself in the game for scrutiny, raises his lantern near Peacock's face, and obstructs purposely Peacock's look, fearing discovery. They continue manoeuvring lanterns at hide and seek — anon desist, when Robin speaks):

ROBIN: I be one Bo-Peep, and I see a sheep.

PEACOCK: Ha, ha, ha! I too, be Bo-Peep, and I no see a sheep — na, na, na, but a sweet lassie, O; for there in the hair of my lady fair, for my ain answer good, I no see the dame coif, but the lassie's snood.

(Pause.)

ROBIN: Why after a man?

PEACOCK: To serve a parish warrant and catch him, if I can.

ROBIN: How runs the warrant?

PEACOCK: Cash, or jail.

ROBIN: What man?

PEACOCK: Burns.

ROBIN (*visibly startled*): Burns! — Burns! — What Burns?
— This Rob the Rhymer?

PEACOCK: The verra' man. Ye must wot of him, wha sae stirs a' the country-side.

ROBIN (*suppressed fury*): Nannie Brice na wot of this rantin', rovin', versifyin' Robin, and vile deceiver? Oh! bitter, bitter be the tear of her wha slighted love bewails. (*Demonstration, head bowed, handkerchief busy.*)

(*Pause.*)

PEACOCK: Might be here — eh?

ROBIN: Och! — Brice's roof, even *barn-roof*, screening that coof?

PEACOCK: Ah! might na the rascal steal a bed?

ROBIN: And dare the risk of a jilted woman's tongue, and a brither's fighting ee?

PEACOCK: "Coof" and "tear," my lassie dear, canna throw me aff. A sure tip I hae to law the Rhymer in Brice's barn this night.

ROBIN: What "Brice's barn," Davie's here, or his brither Willie's, a Sabbath day's journey awa'?

PEACOCK: I be just frae Willie's, as ye name him, and Rob the Rhymer I'll wage a *shiner* is there (*.pointing to barn-loft*), wi' you, anither Nicodemus, serving him at such an hour.

ROBIN: Ye're a' aff the scent. A yearlin' bullock and a lambkin, crony cattle and ailin' for a dressing, tak' this hour. Just as hae the wicked, this coof amang them, too, has friends, wha wadna stick a deceivin' tip to sell. If ye doubt, there's the ladder, wi' hay-loft at your service.
(*Pause.*)

ROBIN: What has skellum Robin been up to?

PEACOCK: A father in prospect under the bar sinister.

ROBIN: Somewhat of that I've heard.

PEACOCK: And the parish guardians exact ten pounds for year's support of the expectation.

ROBIN: Of that, too, somewhat have I heard.

PEACOCK: This ready money must be on the nail, or, by my warrant served, the jail, ere to Jamaica he slips to sail.

ROBIN: Somewhat of it a' I've heard, and if he has wronged the sweetest, dearest lassie in a' the round world, I'm wi' you, bailiff-man, in the hunt, whip and spur. Vile sinner, wicked one, hale him, wale him, jail him, thou bailiff-man (*violently*). Lord, pardon a' my sins, and this too (*aside*).
(*Pause.*)

ROBIN: Canna Rhymer Robin pay?

PEACOCK: Cashless, cashless coof they say, and he winna slip by a golden key.

ROBIN: Nae friends wi' whom his pieces count, to help?

PEACOCK: Proud, proud, Johnnie Peacock hears — over proud to snool or ask.

ROBIN: Can run him down?

PEACOCK: Close on his tracks has been Johnnie; but Johnnie needs a helper, the coof, to hide, has Jacks-at-a-pinch sae mony. Whan I land, a full fat fee comes in, a *special*, over and above the legal, and my helper wad come in halves.

ROBIN: Generous! Fair helper's bait! The penny's the jewel that beautifies a'.

PEACOCK: Of his class a' I meet seem his friends. Wi' such a wrong as ye hae, and such a spirit, were ye a man, Johnnie might ask ye to gie a han'.

(*Pause.*)

ROBIN: Whence this special fee?

PEACOCK: The Old Light Pastors.

ROBIN: And wha be the Old Light Pastors?

PEACOCK (*declamatory*): Lord, Lassie, dinna ye know? Hae the crony cattle sae taken ye, that ye dinna know, that the hold of Calvinism in a' this west of Scotland be disputed by Arminianism — that the kirk, frae tap to toe, be split wide open into twa bitter fighting factions, Old Light high Calvilist here, New Light low Calvin half Arminian there, and a' the country-side be going wild over the holy tussle?

ROBIN: And dinna Johnnie Peacock know, that lassies be less at hame in such heavenly jars? Sae, let Johnnie's pulpit preach on, to tell what it be a' about.

PEACOCK: Fudge! dry bundles of opinions metaphysic, Johnnie Peacock taks it. Wi' zeal for orthodoxy fired, and in the depths of logic mired, these Pastors be.

ROBIN: Bravo! Dry — but frae what you say wad seem to get the blood.

PEACOCK: Lord's cause ne'er gat such a twistle. Names like “hypocrite,” “traitor,” “rascal,” “villain,” each ither gie, and nither be lying. Wi' five points, each, they charge upon each ither like mad.

ROBIN: Five points! Jee! Ye canna mean these messengers for God clash wi' dirks, five to the man?

PEACOCK: Ha, ha, ha! Five points! five dirks! Ha, ha, ha! *Five points* be ways of thinkin' spun by logic frae the work of grace divine upon the mind — as Johnnie taks it, becloudin' the real Gospel Light, *argumentum* makin' decrees for God, wha, in such might and majesty, be unspeakable, incomprehensible, sae far awa', and sae unknown.

ROBIN: Bravo, bravo! And how goes the battle?

PEACOCK: Betwixt the fightings saxpence ither way it be.

The value runs 'twixt tweedledum and tweedledee.

ROBIN: Bravissimo! If Johnnie Peacock has lost an ee, he

hasna lost his sense, and that of high degree. Lord be near thee. Your hand (*shake hands*). — But what has this skellum Robin to do wi' it a'?

PEACOCK: A deal, a deal, my lassie fair. He has jumped plump into the fight, and be Hannibal headin' the New Light.

ROBIN: This skellum, then, can be a fighter, if nae more.

PEACOCK: Ay, ay, a captain — in his line a son of Anak — ithers as grass-hoppers.

ROBIN: How many *points* brings the skellum to the battle?

PEACOCK: But one — yet sae keen, and stings sae sair.

ROBIN: What, prithee?

PEACOCK: Ridicule, ridicule — such power in a chield wha knows how. Hae ye na seen his “Kirk's Alarm,” like anither Samson smitin' the Old Light Pastors hip and thigh?

ROBIN (*as if recalling*): Seems I hae heard somewhat of that fashion.

PEACOCK: Lord! hae ye been living above ground na to know a' about this stir? Why, a' the district has both heard and seen it, and, what's more, be splittin' sides a-laughing. Hae the dressings of the crony cattle gat a' your een and thinkings — or are ye sae devoted to that lambkin, that ye hae nae thought awa'?

ROBIN: She's a bewitchin' creature. That much, wi' a' my heart, I know. What besides I dinna know mysel', Johnnie Peacock may tell.

PEACOCK: 'Twas risky, risky, this “Kirk's Alarm,” fired at the Old Light Pastors, social leaders, heads of congregations wide, and at the verra' hour in mad wrangle wi' the new Lights.

ROBIN: Risky, nae doubt.

PEACOCK: Ay, ay! For a plain plowman to print such quality in irreverent drollish names — as “Daddy Auld,” “Rumble John,” and ithers of that powerful Old Light

clique wha swing the Gospel Club — and at their persons and at their *points* let fly such biting wipes, was risky, I tak it.

ROBIN: Why wasna the skellum smashed?

PEACOCK: Under cover copies gat out, and presently wi' such roars of glee, that the skellum was fain to slip the mask. Old Lights, on the spot, gat wind of it and trouble; and now, wi' it a', the Kilmarnock edition be just out; and in it, too, this "Holy Willie's Prayer," and Old Lights be in such roars of rage, and castin' about how to stap the skellum's quill, if na stap his breath.

ROBIN: Ha! "Holy Willie!" What saint be this, liftin' his haloed head amang the sinners?

PEACOCK: One William Fisher, Ruling Elder of this "Daddy Auld's" Mauchline Kirk.

ROBIN: Old Light?

PEACOCK: Ay, ay.

ROBIN: And New Light Hannibal a-celebratin' his saintship?

PEACOCK: Ay, ay — but in a figure. See this rap at the *five points* in "Holy Willie's Prayer":

O Thou wha in the heavens dost dwell,
 Wha, as it pleases best Thyself,
 Sends one to heaven and ten to hell,
 A' for Thy glory,
 And no for ony good or ill
 They've done afore thee!

PEACOCK: What think ye of that?

ROBIN: Nae poisoned, stinking Arminian smell.

PEACOCK: Ay, ay.

ROBIN: Sae clear and sweet frae Calvin's well.

PEACOCK: Ay, ay. — And this slap, too, at "Holy Willie" himsel'. Allow it, Lassie? 'Tis rough.

ROBIN: One ear I'll lend, and may be but half of that.

PEACOCK: Then, wi' your leave:

O Lord yestreen, thou kens wi' Meg —
 Thy pardon I sincerely beg,
 Oh! may it ne'er be a livin' plague
 To my dishonor,
 And I'll ne'er lift a lawless leg
 Again upon her.

May be Thou lets this fleshly thorn
 Beset Thy servant e'en and morn,
 Lest he owre high and proud should turn,
 'Cause he's sae gifted;
 If sae, Thy hand must e'er be borne,
 Until Thou lift it.

PEACOCK: Weel — what thinkest thou of *that*, for a Ruling Elder of the Kirk?

ROBIN (*pausing*): What does Johnnie Peacock think of it?

PEACOCK: What does Johnnie Peacock think of it? Why, Johnnie Peacock thinks it the most terrible skit that ever was writ. — Aweel — the slap be no amiss, as reports gae, that *Holy Willie* at times be sair troubled wi' fleshly lusts, and vile self gets in.

(*Pause.*)

ROBIN: And where gets in that special fat fee, to go halves wi' the helper?

PEACOCK: Just here: “The Kirk's Alarm,” and “Holy Willie's Prayer” on tap, like unto some wonderment drapt frae the skies, has startled the Old Lights wi' amazement and a tribulation. What next? they cry. Sae they fee me weel to pack aff this terrible Robin the Rhymer.

ROBIN: And how, pray?

PEACOCK: Help his flight, some cry, to tak the Nancy for West Indies. Na, na, be the louder cry. He'll yet be livin' to fire anither "Kirk's Alarm," or "Holy Willie."

ROBIN: Yet livin'! Merciful Heavens! Wad stap Robin's breath?

PEACOCK: What nicer turn for these Old Light fighting cocks, than despatchin' a lusty devil? Yet nae blood spillin'. Enough to serve the warrant.

(Pause.)

PEACOCK: Hae ye been wi' Robin?

ROBIN: Hae ye forgat that Robin wad na dare a jilted woman's ee?

PEACOCK: Ye know Robin, then?

ROBIN: Ay! As my ain sel'.

PEACOCK: Ye know, then, a chield of misfortune. Nae cash to satisfy the parish guardians, the warrant means *jail* — and jail means death to such melancholy and excessive sensibility, they tell me.

ROBIN: But ye haena served the warrant yet. What of the Nancy for the slip 'twixt cup and the lip?

PEACOCK: We hae sure word the Nancy winna be cleared to sail this sen'night. Meanwhile, the law will hae gat Robin, unless he staps his breath wi' his ain hand.

ROBIN: His ain hand! Tut, tut! Wha says that?

PEACOCK: He be sae intense melancholic, and despairin' by a' accounts.

ROBIN: That doesna square wi' what I be told, that Robin, more than ithers, is a bright laddie.

PEACOCK: What *ye* be told. To *mysel'* what be the accounts, but that toil, toil, exceedin' toil — dreary strugglin' — bad luck — nae cash — despairin' poverty — hae settled upon his countenance deep melancholy?

ROBIN: How is it, then, he plays his cards sae weel wi' the lassies?

PEACOCK: Ah! true, true, they speak of a change, that, wi' those of interest to him, he be transfigured, like unto One we wot of, that his face shines as by a beam of the sun, his een be a' aglow, and his tongue a marvel.

(*Pause.*)

PEACOCK: Sae he bloomed, nae doubt, whan he took this Lassie's ee.

(*Pause — Nannie with head bowed and handkerchief busy.*)

ROBIN (*raising head*): By these salt, salt tears, that drap down by my nose, Johnnie Peacock's kind heart will please drap the Lassie's woes.

(*Pause.*)

PEACOCK: Let me gie news: That orthodoxy yet may prance, tomorrow eve will see an Old Light meeting, to think upon extra steps against this rabid Robin — at Rev. William Auld's (this *Daddy Auld's*), the Old Light district Pastors attending — Miller, McKinley, Peebles, Mitchell, Russell and ithers.

ROBIN: Wad to God I could attend, too. Certes, I wadna be dumb.

PEACOCK: Jee! 'twill be a thriller. They be ready to tear Robin limb frae limb, as the devil's own.

ROBIN: Blythe be the bird that sings upon their graves.

PEACOCK: And suspected turncoats, too, I hear, will be called to account, those Old Lights, wha, while cussin' Robin's blasts, hail his genius.

ROBIN: Wad that I could be there!

PEACOCK: Scotch pride, you see, slips into Old Light loyalty.

ROBIN: Wad to God some way wad open to be amang them!

PEACOCK: Pastor Peebles be one of the suspects. Betwixt him and furious Pastor Russell fisticuffs, I hear, scarcely hae been prevented, sae tremendous the excitement, and a clash be no unlikely at the meeting. Johnnie Peacock

must be there, to report upon the hunt, and Johnnie's in trouble.

ROBIN: O dear! what unblest side, is it, of man's revolvin' mony-sided lot, turns up now for Johnnie?

PEACOCK: Johnnie, wha needs cash, may be fired frae the Old Light job. Wad ye know, at bottom, why a helper Johnnie needs?

ROBIN: A willin' ear be Johnnie's, if na a helpin'.

PEACOCK: Weel, to the tale: Amang a' those of Robin's run wi' whom it may be thought he be kept in hidin', Johnnie finds only Robin's friends. Robin has nae faults, it seems, or, if ony, they a' in Latin lie — nane in Scotch or English. Some be enemies in a blind, to pat me aff his track. To Brice's barn surely I was tipped for Robin hidin', in his place to find a lassie bloomin'. But one tip yet I hae and tak for Gospel.

ROBIN: Prithee, tell me.

PEACOCK: That the skellum, leaving for Greenock, will be at hame this night next, to mither and a' to say fareweel, and there, to execute the warrant, Johnnie will be.

ROBIN: And might execute upon a dead body.

PEACOCK (*excited*): Wow! What mean ye? Dead body! Lord deliver Johnnie frae being wi' ony dead body.

ROBIN: Nae pleasing companionship, certes, but why the break?

PEACOCK: How, na lang-syne, the circumstances of a dead body gave Johnnie such fright and faint, I needna tell. In heart's deep hangs a fearsome memory, and I be warned against ony dead-room, as begettin' a Falling Sickness.

(*Pause — Robin reflecting.*)

ROBIN: Aweel — better tak care. If the skellum be at hame, may be 'twad be his body only, his soul in flight amang the stars.

PEACOCK: Isna he called stalwart?

ROBIN: But hae ye na been told, as ye yoursel' but just now said, that he be sae intense melancholic — that exceedin' toil, bad luck, despairin' poverty, and a', hae deeply touched him? Sae full of warm Scots blood, mightna this hour of adieu to Scotland, and fareweel hand and lip to mither and a', be too much for life's brittle thread, already strained?

(Pause.)

PEACOCK: Aweel! God man his soul to bear. It be my last warrant chance. I need the cash. I'll tak the risk, which, wi' a' ye say, I canna but count small.

(Pause.)

ROBIN: Johnnie's tale is yet to hae an end.

PEACOCK: What now?

ROBIN: Why a helper Johnnie needs.

PEACOCK: Certes: — As I hae said, some be enemies in a blind, to put me aff the skellum's track. What's mickle more, a day and a night, may be twa three, they gat me drunk. Sae time has been lost, precious time; for, at risk of fee, the warrant must be served afore the Nancy clears at Greenock.

These tricks and lapses the Old Lights, Johnnie fears, may hae gat wind of, and, if sae, he may be fired, and Johnnie needs the cash.

ROBIN: Whare, amang a' ye say, comes in the helper?

PEACOCK: It bethought me to mak out a circuit of skellum hunts, had I a Jack-at-a-pinch to stand for it and set it out, and sae help me at the Meeting.

(Pause.)

ROBIN (*aside*): To be at this meeting, I wad tak a giant risk.

(Pause.)

ROBIN: How could I a helper be, and na a disguised bearded man, withoutten anither name?

(Pause — Robin reflecting.)

ROBIN: Something might be done. Tomorrow evening's edge meet me, as Andy Cargill, at the weeping birch afront the manse of Pastor Auld.

CURTAIN

ACT II

ACT II

Scene: Room at manse of REV. WILLIAM AULD. Time: Evening. Old Light Pastors and Elders present: REVERENDS WILLIAM AULD, JOHN RUSSELL, JAMES MCKINLAY, ANDREW MITCHELL, WILLIAM PEEBLES, and others.

It is understood, that the members move about, more or less — that short colloquies may be conducted from seats — that others speak standing and in a formal way.

They meet under special circumstances of excitement — all charged for explosions.

MCKINLAY (*rising*): My dear Brethern, we being here for a most important purpose, I think our meeting should be of formal character, and therefore suggest, that Brother Auld be called to the chair.

(*Pause, McKinlay awaiting reply to suggestion.*)

Hearing no objection, I declare my suggestion unanimously carried.

(*Pastor Auld takes chair, and appoints Rev. Alexander Moodie Secretary.*)

(*Door rings. Enter two seedy-looking old men, servant announcing John Peacock and Andrew Cargill, the latter (Burns) with grizzly beard and gray hair. They take rear seats.*)

AULD: For your presence, my dear Brethern, let me thank you. Your counsels are needed. An angry cloud impends. This poetaster, Burns, has allied himself enthusiastically with the New Light faction, and that we, of the orthodox Old Lights, have in him an adversary to be taken into account, will not be denied.

His fugitive, written-out, pieces had aroused, we all know, a remarkable local interest. Genius sparkled in them;

and when it became noised about, that his poems were passing through the Kilmarnock press, and racy leakings got out, the interest mounted. The booklet has appeared. To Ayrshire it is a revelation. Extraordinary enthusiasm is greeting it.

Unhappily, we were forced into conflict with the heresies of these New Lights before this recruit of theirs turned up. With the bellows of Vulcan he fans the fire, lampooning us, you see, most vilely.

Notwithstanding, instead of being as one amidst the heat and danger of the hour, divisions among our own selves, regarding this rustic and his work, most unfortunately have arisen.

Dear Brethern, your ear: (*Most impressive*) *Orthodoxy is challenged. To grasp the situation — to get together and get busy — to see what can be done to offset this powerful reinforcement on the other side — IS A PLAIN, PRESSING, PARAMOUNT DUTY.*

McKINLAY (*rising*): Heart and soul I am with the Chair. The author of such pieces as “The Ordination,” “The Holy Fair,” “The Kirk’s Alarm,” we dare not shut eyes upon. His versifications —

MILLER (*interrupting*): Let me amend my Brother’s phraseology, and, for the scope of “versifications,” add *profanations*.

RUSSELL: I would further amend, and add *villifications*; for the mad-man’s hand is against God and man alike.

McKINLAY: His versifications, profanations, villifications (*laughter*) — any more emendations (*great laughter*)? I am open for record (*laughter*).

RUSSELL: Why not cap with *self-damnation*s (*rattling laughter, and cries of “hear,” “hear,”*), seeing the fellow evidently is marked for judgment?

McKINLAY: His versifications, profanations, villifications,

self-damnations (*laughter*) — any more (*great laughter*)? The string may bear *elongations* (*bursts of laughter*).

These fulminations, then, bunching the lot — fresh, in book form, from the Kilmarnock press — are being seized upon, right and left, up and down, by high and by low, at the street corner, in castle and in cot-house, and an adversary, Brethern, to the Old Light cause indeed has arisen.

MILLER: And what further may not follow, and of what depths, who can tell?

RUSSELL: For information you might call up the office of his Satanic Majesty (*tumult of laughter and clapping*). The mad-man holds correspondence there, and you would get depths enough (*renewed laughter*).

PEEBLES: We are compelled, Gentlemen, to admit the power of this man, and, as Scotsmen, feel pride in it, apart from its direction.

RUSSELL: Power! — Power! — Yes, it may be — but what power, sir? Verily, the devil's, who stands at his right hand. Is the Reverend William Peebles — enrolled and rated, as he is, among the pillars of the Kirk — ready to avow pride in the works of the devil?

(*Sensation, and loud cries of "hear!" "hear!"*)

MITCHELL: Brother William is disposed to be tender to the arch Arminian.

PEEBLES: Ha! What fine mare's nest is this my dear Brother has stumbled on? His faculty of discrimination indeed is abroad. I was expressing simply the natural pride a Scotsman ought to feel in a countryman's brilliant gifts, however much their use may be deplored.

MITCHELL: And is no touch of tenderness involved, no lurking of a bias?

PEEBLES: *Bias*, forsooth, my dear Brother! If bias, in what direction, pray? Any necessary bias toward this rustic

Rhymer's sins I fail to see. With all our Brother's elect qualities, he is overtaken sometimes by ludicrous confusion of ideas.

MITCHELL (*aroused*): I challenge, sir, an instance.

PEEBLES: Whose recent invocation, then, for the royal family, was it, that took on this expression: God bless the king, and *his* Majesty, the Queen, and *her* Royal Highness, the Prince of Wales?

(*Rattling laughter. Chair raps to order.*)

PEEBLES: Challenges being in order, I challenge myself, sir, the showing of a shadow of a shade of bias, in aught I've said or done, toward the profanations and abominations of this rustic Bard.

MITCHELL: Recalling "The Kirk's Alarm," as reported to me (I've been unable to secure a copy of the booklet, so rapidly has it been taken), "Rob the Rhymer," as he styles himself —

RUSSELL: Pardon the interruption, Brother, but the madman's styling should rather be "Rob, the Ranter."
(*Laughter.*)

MITCHELL: Very well — "Rob, the Ranter," is so *very* tender with Brother William, sweetly patting him as "Poet Willie," while be-spattering the rest of us.

(*Laughter, with claps, and cries of "hear!" "hear!"*)

PEEBLES: If "Rob, the Ranter," in the extravagance of assertion, chose to pen it so, my Brother hints an inference. What, let me ask?

MITCHELL: That the doctrine of reciprocal favors is appealing.

RUSSELL: This reporter, if actually he has seen "The Kirk's Alarm," has foisted upon Brother Peebles a practical joke of monster proportions. Ha, ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha!

PEEBLES (*aroused*): What can our dear Brother mean?

RUSSELL: That the expression "Poet Willie" the Rhymster,

in the next line, opens up, leaving knocked pat into a cocked hat Brother Mitchell's "patting sweetly," and the compliment left handed and mal-odorous completely.

(*Great laughter.*)

PEEBLES (*bristling*): Again I ask, what *can* our Brother mean?

RUSSELL: This, my dear sir: A copy of the vile piece I have seen myself, and to the phrase "Poet Willie" the Rhymer gives a let *down* unco silly; or, if you take it a let *up*, he describes the Poet's road unco hilly.

(*Great laughter.*)

PEEBLES (*red hot*): I demand, now, before these Brethern and in the presence of God, that the Gentleman interpret his riddles.

RUSSELL: Does not "Rob, the Rhymer," then, our Brother describe, as one who Pegasus can never bestride, getting no nearer the winged steed, than to *smell the place where he dungs*.

(*Profound sensation, with loud cries of "hear!" "hear!" Chair raps to order.*)

PEEBLES (*red hot*): So, the Rev. John Russell verily has seen "The Kirk's Alarm." A copy of this precious publication I, like many others, have been unable, in the rush after it, to secure, and know it only as reported. As reported — correctly, I take it — the Rhymster names one "Rumble John" of tremendous voice, competent, in the Rhymster's words, to "*roar every note of the damned.*" My Reverend Brother (*hand-wave to Pastor Russell*), no doubt, was observant here, as in other parts of this piece, and scarcely could hesitate, as no other would, in placing his finger immediately on the original.

RUSSELL (*red hot*): And, prithee, what of that, sir? The vital question recurs: Could our Reverend Brother himself deliver God's message more forcibly and better?

PEEBLES: Merely I would suggest, that our *Boanerges* should limit his "damned roarings," in the interest of some, at least, of his hearers, to whom the raptures of heaven offer argument more appealing than the terrors of hades — all love, all joy, all praises, no roasting in blue blazes.

(*Bursts of laughter.*)

RUSSELL (*fast, furious, resounding*): Very well, sir, very well, nothing loathe, believe me, it being distinctly understood, that, from roastings, I except those who are disposed to be apologists for this mad-man, this rabid, ribald Rhymer.

(*Addressing Chair*) The atrocious charge, sir, of having a God-given tongue I shall neither palliate nor deny. As to its alleged manner of use, I am nowise disturbed. My Reverend Brother has a mouth and a tongue of his own, and, if he cannot bite, he can bark.

(*Sensation — cries of "hear!" "hear!"*)

In reference to this mad-man, Burns, he is unblest in his very locality. From the period, when it was the centre of such bloody family feuds as that of the Kennedys — when, in the broad light of day, one scarcely could walk the streets with safety — Ayr has the legacy of a wicked spirit, and in its atmosphere, sir, this mad-man was born and bred.

Some original turn of thought in this rustic must be allowed. His card is an impious audacity. It startles — for a day. *Tomorrow* — why, sir, tomorrow he is doomed to drop out of sight, his reputable pieces *overwhelmed, buried, lost* in the dirt of his unparalleled vulgarity, salacity, profanity!

(*Resounding amens.*)

Personally, he is a fine representative of his salacious lines. Do not his loves change with every moon? Is he not a notable cock of the roost, a libertine by eminence,

with his hundred sweet-hearts a goat of excessive ability!
(Loud cries of "hear!" "hear!")

And apart from his formally wicked phase, how can an elegant mind, knowing him, be affected toward him? His pieces measure his æsthetic character. What is that character? Is he not, sir, the very equivalent for pretentiousness? Is not his heart, as he himself confesses, ever panting for distinction? Is he not ashamed of his circumstances, burning to be thought of as something finer than he is? Though a villager, does he not, in speaking, studiously avoid all crude village expressions? What means this affecting, in his speech, the gentleman of elegance? Is he laboring to accommodate himself to the conventions of society and aristocracy? Has ridiculous ambition been secretly nourishing the idea of appearing at the Capital? Is this rustic dreaming to strut among the literary lights there? Dream of Alnaschar! Impudence *in excelsis*:

(Vociferous applause — cries of "hear!" "hear!" — "lay on!" "lay on!" Chair raps to order.)

And this man, sir, of such a character, by profession an Arminian, at heart an infidel, by rule a bibulous and tavern habitué, who rides a whirlwind assaulting the Kirk, a torrent of ridicule upon its representatives, the joy of the New Light, the stress of the Old Light, the street jeer of the Reverend Pastors, can any one, sir, be of us (*significant glance at Pastor Peebles*) who, with bias and apologetic air, softly approaches this man? Is the Trojan horse within this city of God? What, Mr. President, is the Presbytery for, but to apply the test of orthodoxy? Should not steps —

(Pastor Auld, deeply moved by the turn of the meeting, with resounding hand upon table and springing to his feet, breaks in):

AULD (*tremendously energetic and impressive*): God's mercy on us, my distracted Brethern! Here we are — at what? Why, pelting each other — bad, bad enough, God knows; but worse indeed, when the missiles are those very ones which this arch adversary, against whom we have met together to consider self-protection measures, is, *himself*, furnishing and hurling at us! Gracious Heaven! Have we totally lost our wits? Has this Kilmarnock edition absolutely crazed us? For myself I feel humiliated — for you I am ashamed — I am amazed — I feel affrighted — I tremble. Can God be with us? Lord have mercy upon us: For God's sake, my Brethern, I do beseech you to retire a moment to the closet of the heart, and *learn what we are, and why, at this moment, we are here!*

(The brilliant light suddenly is out. The orchestra suddenly has ceased. In an instant all is dark and still. — A few moments pass. The light is on. Pastor Auld's prayer-appeal has won.)

RUSSELL (*to Chair. Subdued, impressive*): This Kilmarnock edition, dear sir, has turned loose among us the imps of Satan, to turn our heads. As apologist in chief, I withdraw all reflections, all insinuations (*hand-wave toward Rev. Peebles*), and everything, I do solemnly declare, I do put aside, to accomplish the object of this meeting, in concerting, if possible, protective measures against the malignant star arisen among us.

(“ Hear! ” “ hear! ”)

PEEBLES: With my Reverend Brother I shake willing hands; and am I not assured, that the spirit of his sentiments is that of this godly company?

(Chorus of low, intense yeas.)

AULD: Right cordially, my dear Brethern, do I salute this spirit. To our task: To underrate this adversary will never do. Whatever, in the future, may be his standing, we are bound to consider Burns, as he is today.

McKINLAY: True, most true, 'Tis folly to deny to him a bold and original genius, which, as now the recognized champion of the New Lights, he is directing against us in frightening energy of expression.

MILLER: Orthodoxy, in West Scotland, verily is challenged. Of satire this man Burns is a master. Already his heretical sayings are on the rounds like winged things.

McKINLAY: Insects busy with pestiferous stings.

PEEBLES: And spicing even the sport of the rabble with their flings.

MITCHELL: To that I can bear witness. What think you of such as this on the "go," which yesterday, on the public square of Monkton, within my hearing, a corner gang quoted at me from "The Kirk's Alarm," one giving out; "Say, are Calvin's sons sure of their spiritual guns?" And a fellow cad answering: "Ain't they crack stuff, wi' hearts holdin' powder enough, and skulls store-houses of lead?"

(Sensation.)

AULD: And that atrocious attack in "Holy Willie's Prayer" upon our William Fisher, my friend and my Elder, now in retreat from the winks and finger-ends of the street!

(Sensation — cries of "hear!" "hear!")

AULD: Think of it, my Brethern! Terrible! terrible! What heart, hitherto, ever conceived so insulting an appeal to heaven! What praying lips were ever supposed to utter so vile a piece, and those the lips of a Ruling Elder.

(Sensation — cries of "hear!" "hear!")

AULD: Excusing his self-confessed lewdness on the probable plea of being allowed of God, lest the super-eminence of his heavenly gifts, without such check, should expose him to spiritual pride!

(Profound sensation — cries of "hear!" "hear!")

AULD: *O tempora! O mores!* Where can be found the word for the abomination!

RUSSELL: Satan's dictionary might give it.

PEEBLES (*intense*): Gentlemen, gentlemen, we must act. Shall the mad-man go on like a vulture swooping down upon us, with talons and beak for blood?

MILLER: And perhaps with increasing malevolence? What can be done?

AULD: I have invited my Brethern hither, in order that they might consider the situation.

MILLER: Has Brother Auld a proposition?

AULD: First, a word with these new-comers.

John Peacock (*addressing Peacock*) —

PEACOCK: Ay, sir — but *Johnnie*, na *John*, may it please your worship, be the better way.

AULD: Certainly, as you wish, though *John* strikes me as a more dignified address for an old man and officer of the law.

PEACOCK: Na, na, whan bad luck strikes Johnnie down and out.

BURNS: Ay, ay, Johnnie. Wi' wind and tide fair in our tail, we can be unco dignified and good; but what in the teeth of both to sail?

PEACOCK: Ay, ay, Andy — then Johnnie be no for dignity, but what smacks of sympathy on the edge of the *Johnnie* name, and invites.

BURNS: And invites! Losh man! And bad luck still striking Johnnie? Angel creatures there be now and then, but och! pestilentially bad be the general run of men.

AULD: To those of my Brethern, uninformed as to all the circumstances of the situation, let me say, that Johnnie Peacock, a business unfortunate, a peculiar, a man of learning and antiquarian tastes, and but yesterday among us, is a bailiff, with warrant, issued at the instance of the

parish guardians, for the arrest of this man Burns, in connection with an intrigue.

MILLER: Simply for an intrigue? I've heard of complications.

AULD: For a year's support of the child unborn, so many pounds, ten, I hear, the jail being the sanction.

RUSSELL: Is the mad-man unable to pay?

AULD: So it appears; and he is endeavoring, by hay-cock and otherwise hidings, to escape the bailiff, until, by ship now due at Greenock, he can make for the West Indies — so they say.

PEEBLES: Self-expatriation! The finger of God! Riddance of his person means riddance of his pen.

MITCHELL: Provided he expatriates far enough.

PEEBLES: Why, across the sea it is to be, to the West Indies, as Brother Auld tells us, they say. Would you have him expatriate to far Cathay?

PEEBLES: Evidently, the thing for us to do, would be to satisfy the warrant, a trifle, and help the ribald Rhymster to the West Indies. In my humble judgment safety from further blasts on expatriation hinges.

MILLER: Brother Peebles' humble judgment it may be, but, to my way of thinking, a snap judgment.

PEEBLES: We all, physically, are on seat, or on feet, but psychologically on tiptoe for the grounds of Brother Miller's opinion.

MILLER: Why, sir, an ardent Scotsman, as he's represented to be, and embittered by being forced his native land to flee, might we not expect his fulminations, triply charged, to be fired back, like Parthian arrows, to plague us?

PEEBLES: Did my Brother ever hear of, or read of, or think of, torrid zone poets worth the name? Would not his inspiration ooze out with the perspiration?

(*Laughter.*)

MILLER: But here we have a frozen one, so to speak, out of the North, and, thawed and opened up under the equator, would he not be tenfold a fire-brand and a hater?

(Round laughter.)

AULD: Pleasing exchanges, my dear Brethern, but what bearings have they on the purpose of our deliberations? Not a tittle. If we are to employ Johnnie Peacock, as some of us already have been doing, and as I shall propose to this meeting to continue to do, expatriation must needs be thrown out, Peacock, in the interest of the warrant, being bound to the parish guardians to prevent, as he can, Greenock embarkation, another word, to all intents, for expatriation.

RUSSELL: Has Brother Auld, then, a practical advisement looking to protection against this mad-man and hay-cock absconder?

AULD: So I have just intimated.

RUSSELL: Yes — the bud has appeared. We all are ready for the bloom.

AULD: My advice is to fee Johnnie Peacock to press with renewed activity the execution of the warrant, no less for our interest, than for that of the Parish Guardians, whose legal agent, as bailiff, he is.

McKINLAY: That means the jail.

AULD: Yes — Burns being unable to satisfy the money end of the warrant.

(Pause.)

ELDER MUIR: What effect imprisonment may have in letting the man down a peg and withdrawing a scoffer pen, we cannot say. We may indulge a hope.

MITCHELL: That, at least, it may smudge his wings to check this unhallowed soaring near the skies.

McKINLAY: At any rate, it is something practical, offered on the spot to our hand.

RUSSELL: With genuine satisfaction I take Brother Auld's advice, and for the sound reason (for which advice generally is taken), that it falls in with my inclination.

(*Laughter.*)

RUSSELL: For mad men the jail is the proper den. Let the absconder go there, to his doom.

MUIR: To his doom? Do you mean his tomb?

PEEBLES: His verse, or his vitality?

RUSSELL (*addressing Muir*): Dost thou know aught of the absconder's personality?

MUIR: Nothing to the point.

RUSSELL: Know, then, that his sensibility, as reported, is an exaggerated super, the extremest, of one born without a skin, as said of the infidel Rousseau. The jail, a mortal terror and a shock, would it not break his spirit — nay, the thread of life itself (*speech and manner intense*)?

MEETING: Amen, amen!

AULD: Already some of us have been feeing Johnnie Peacock, like Esau of old a "cunning hunter," to press the warrant and have promised a bonus, when he lands. To my Brethern I shall look for aid in the matter.

McKINLAY: This meeting, I am sure, backs Brother Auld, and, hearing no voice to the contrary (*pauses, looking around*), I anticipate, and declare the would-be motion carried unanimously and with great applause.

MUIR: Let us thén rally our Peacock to the chase, spurring the willing horse. Brother Auld backs him O. K., as a good-to-bet-on bird of prey.

(*Round laughter.*)

AULD: He is here to report upon the hunt.

(*Addressing Peacock*) I see that Johnnie Peacock has a companion.

PEACOCK: Ay, ay, your worship.

AULD: A helper on the hunt?

PEACOCK: Ay, ay, sir.

AULD: Already he has made us sensible of his presence. As coming within our fee and bonus, we have an interest in asking: Who, what, and whence he is.

PEACOCK: He *looks* years and size enough, and *is* wise enough to speak for himsel'.

BURNS: Andy Cargill, your Worship, and at your service. Lord preserve us a' frae the gallows, that shameful death. (*Meeting shows amazement at sentiment.*)

RUSSELL (*stage whisper*): Crazy man hunting mad-man. War when they meet.

BURNS: Andy, sir, be a true blue Scot, wi' hame in the "Highlands," whare he was born na to drink the sweet, or eat the fat; patient, sir, wi' the man of Uzz yet in the lead; and a justified billie, sir, whan ye speak him fair, and strake him cannie wi' the hair.

(*Applause.*)

RUSSELL: Stroke t'other way, then, means what — wild cat?

BURNS: Wad it na be just as easy to say "Highland Welcome?"

PEEBLES: But would it be just as true?

BURNS: Enough that Andy *does*, as wad the man of Uzz — he be patient, Reverend *sirs*.

(*Laughter.*)

PEEBLES: Happily answered, and bespeaks our Andy a happy sort of billie.

BURNS: Happy as the minister wha kissed the fiddler's wife, and couldna preach for thinking of it.

RUSSELL: Remarkable, when love should have been a text so insinuating.

BURNS: Happy? Ay, ay. Happy here to help Johnnie, my good auld cockie. He's the ace and choice of honest men; and no that, too, for terror of damnation. It's just a carnal inclination.

(*Applause.*)

BURNS: Lang syne in the Highlands we twa were unco thick thegither. Love blinked, wit slapped, and we forgat there's care upon the earth. Casting our colt's teeth, we betook oursels' to curious learning, picking out the anti-quarian trade.

MOODIE: (*Noting Andy's seedy look*): Apparently, the trade has not been profitable.

PEACOCK: Andy, for profits, has been rummaging too mickle round year No. 1, for things he couldna gat at all — as Eve's petticoat.

BURNS: Didna Andy give it up, because that piece of fig-leaf handiwork, prized and preserved, had been eat by a goat in the Ark?

PEACOCK: Anither dead failure was a coin of Satan's coronation.

BURNS: Dead failure! Stuff and nonsense! Na, na! Because nae one, at ony price, could be hired to gae below for it. (*Round laughter.*)

BURNS: Weel — upon us, one day, blew the bitter biting north, and wha were friends in fair weather, became brithers in foul. (*Applause.*)

AULD: You are here, then, to aid a needy brother.

BURNS: Ay, ay. Johnnie gat me word his pith began to fail, and Andy's here.

PEACOCK: Besides, Johnnie has lost his trackin' hound.

BURNS: Poisoned, nae doubt, by those rantin', rovin', billie friends of skellum Burns.

PEACOCK: Tanko was a faithful bitch.

BURNS: I'm aye for that. We twa carry her weeds. Sense and fidelity, your worship, be prime qualities; and whan they meet in one in whom we can confide, we draw high thegither, and twa more legs dinna much matter.

(*Pause.*)

AULD: What news of his man has Johnnie Peacock?

PEACOCK: We hae been hot on his heels, slippin' frae hame to hame amang his friends.

AULD: Take good care to hide him — eh?

PEACOCK: Ay, ay, sir — sleepin' him in barns and under haycocks. We hae followed him a' round and round — were weel on his tracks up and down the Nith, frae its birth in the wilds of New Cumnock, to the Solway, the lovely winding Nith, whare sae oft he be seen musin' — at Kilmarnock amang the weavers — at Irvine amang the sailors —

BURNS (*Interrupting*): Och, at Irvine! We canna forgat, sir, that night at Irvine, that *night*, sir. Our travels mainly must be by night, whan ghosts and witches hap and tricks be handy.

AULD: What hap at Irvine?

BURNS: Hap indeed, sir. Had tip, sir, to round up the skellum there. (*The following in highly-declamatory style*): We were toddlin' down by Willie's mill. The new-moon stared o'er Cumnock's distant hill. The trusty hound was trottin' by, wi' nose agog the scent to try, if the hay-loft, whare we'd been tipped, should show the slippery skellum slipped.

(*Applause.*)

BURNS: (*High declamation continued*): 'Twas an unco skellum squad, and tight, met us, for tricks, that Irvine night, e'en wi' Luna's beams on a' sae bright. Bamboozle stuff they gat in finely — rich foaming ale that drank divinely. We twa anon did gat fu' canty. Wha says *drunk*? Avaunt! We just had plenty. But me they jollified and swore, that Andy C. was half seas o'er, and dared me Luna's horns to score. Wi' a' my power I did set myself, but whether she had three or four I couldna tell. (*Great applause.*)

RUSSELL: Andy must be our orator.

PEACOCK: In such ways, sir, by skellum squads, hae we been sair stopped.

BURNS: One weel nigh stopped Johnnie's breath.

AULD: Indeed! Tell us, Johnnie. We shall see, that the quest trials are not forgotten in the fee.

BURNS: Andy must tell of such a hap. Johnnie couldna, if he wad. He gat aff the hooks that night.

MITCHELL: Well, Johnnie is here, apparently in the flesh, to hear his death narrated, if he cannot narrate it himself.
(*Laughter.*)

BURNS: Johnnie be in one unco fright. He fears the job's to be his death. Letters come ilka day, skellum squads sae busy, wi' naithing in them but death's auld picture — and such a picture, in such colors and drawn by master-hand: An awful scythe, out over one shoulder, clear dangling hangs; a three-forked fish-spear, on the ither, lies large and lang. Ilka letter has this awful picture and nane else, and Johnnie's gettin's eerie.

We had peered about John Wilson's — through Maucline, and Tarbolton — and tarried nigh "Auld Rome Forest," whare lives the skellum's aunt, Dame Allen.

(*High declamatory style*): That hour, of night's black arch the key-stone, that dreary hour saw us on way-home; and such a night we mak' the road in, as ne'er poor sinner was abroad in. The wind blew as 'twad blawn its last; the rattling rain rose on the blast; the lightning gleams the darkness swallowed; loud, deep and lang the thunder bellowed. That night a child might understand some devilish business was on hand.

(*Applause.*)

(*Declamation continued*): Wi' Ayr aback we lumbered on a stretch of road for horrors known. Afront, auld Alloway's haunted kirk was nigh, whare ghosts and howlets

nightly cry. The doubling storm roars through the woods; the roadway runs wi' ankle floods; the lightnings flash frae pole to pole; near and more near the thunders roll. Johnnie was in an eerie bother. I watched him as I'd watch a brother. Now, holding fast his good blue bonnet; now, croons, for nerves, an auld Scots sonnet; now, starin' round wi' prudent cares, lest witches catch him unawares. A lightning gleam gies nerves the rigors, glimpsing apparition figures. We just had passed the double cairns, whare hunters found the murdered bairns, and near the thorn aboon the well, whare Mungo's mither hanged hersel', whan Johnnie, wow! in wild alarms, stumbles to a dead man's arms! He was an awful sight to see, sir, by lightning's gleam just glimpsed to me, sir. Each bristled hair stood like a stake. Johnnie, I feared, wad never wake. Wi' hand on hip and upward ee, his feeble pulse forgat to play — he cried aloud and died away!

(Great applause. Cries of "hear!" "hear!")

PEACOCK: In such ways, sir, the hunt has been sair blocked, and by those verra' skellum squads, nae doubt. The loons, I wot it was, wha tricked us wi' a dummy corpse that stormy night, the apparition figures we glimpsed, finding out Johnnie's peculiar relation to a dead body, dooming a falling-sickness fit.

But the end be in sight, sir. We hae a sure tip the skellum will be at hame tomorrow night wi' misting een, to say fareweel, as he leaves for Greenock, to dear auld Scotland, and to mither and a'. He be caught on the roost, or I be nae Peacock, and the skellum can dry his tears a-jail.

BURNS: Johnnie, tomorrow night, gets his victim aff the roost, and Andy gets aff the job I be wi' him. Then aff Andy gets to the Highlands, wi' a last word for Johnnie frae the tide of kindness that warms the heart of Andy.

Be deuce shy, O Johnnie, of stumbling to dead men's arms. Such eldritch fright be wi' ye still, that to stumble on a dead wad be without remead. 'Twad be like ye had touched anither Elisha's bones, to stand upon the feet and smite.

And to ye, O Reverend sirs, in plain broad Scotch, be Andy's fareweel:

(*Straightened statue, bold air, resounding tone, suppressed anger*) Andy has heard a rumble and shakes his head. Land of cakes, of Bruce and Wallace, justice, justice for a brither Scot! If no the thing he should be, if no the thing he would be, nor even the thing he could be, he's *Sandy* to the core, and na here to speak for himsel'.

Wha is it says "Andy must be our orator?" — Andy is willin':

A hundred sweethearts! — Is God to be arraigned, Reverend sir (*hand-wave toward Pastor Russell*), for gieing a comely form for these women to run after? Faith, sir, then tackle ye the women, out dressed to death and keen to be killin'!

A hundred sweethearts! — Fudge! — Old wives gossipy chagrin for faded charms that na langer win. O wives, O wives, be fair, be fair! Think how once yoursels' dear bonny lads ye wanted!

Hundred sweethearts! — Onyhow, to step aside, sir, is human, and if numbers the argument must be, what justice for such tremendous rumble at the Scot, wi' just a beggarly hundred, whan the wisest man the world e'er saw be your Scripture down for *three hundred*?

Grooming himself to strut amang the illuminati! Weel dear sir (*wave toward Pastor Russell*), if God has given him a true spark of nature's fire, shall he be branded for nursing it, to shine in its kindred sphere? Faith, sir! God himsel', then, brand.

And ah there! have a care, have a care, ye Reverend illuminati sirs, lest this nurseling billie overtak' ye, and the *hay-loft absconder* cock his nose aboon ye a'. Wi' ye "rigid righteous" — of three mile prayer and half mile graces — do ye think our *Sandy's* destiny wad shift places? Today ye're rich, and strut, and look big, but if ye lay by the hat and the wig, ye wad show, may be, a calf's head of small value; and in the generations, as time runs aff his reels, what think ye of being known but as the wee doggies snapping at *Sandy's* heels? What think ye, sirs, of such sole call upon fame to hand ye on?

Shall old wives' gossip, then, imaginations, exaggerations, mal-representations, in voice to "roar every note of the damned," (*wave toward Pastor Russell*) be rumbled out to down our *Sandy* for random fits of folly, and jabs at the *cloth* amang ye that's spotted, whare the more 'tis a truth, sir, the less 'tis a libel?

Ah! this defamer gies us a glance at that hideous sight, a naked human heart. Godly timber be scant, whare he's taken for a saunt. Let him repent, or get auld Hornie after him. He may run to hide; but wha wad cry a wonder at his escaping like a *hay-loft absconder*? Na, na! For such auld Hornie's sure, shaking 'em o'er the mouth of hell, there to hang, and roar, and yell, tremendous *rumble*; and, if they offer to rebel, in letting 'em tumble. (*The bearing and sentiments of Cargill, suddenly so changed, strike the meeting with dumb amazement — fascinate, as by a species of witchcraft, throwing a spell, checking protest of members, or gavel of chairman. As Cargill turns upon heel and dashes out, the spell is broken, Pastor Auld vociferating above the Babel*):

AULD (*to Peacock — in thunder tones*): Bring that man back!
Upon my soul I believe it's that fellow Burns!

(*The curtain drops upon a scene of wild confusion, the meet-*

ing vociferating and gesticulating — one shouting, “I thought he was too familiar with that Kilmarnock edition,” and another and another responding, “So did I” — “So did I.”)

ACT III

ACT III

Scene: Evening. The bed-room of Robert and Gilbert Burns, being the middle attic of the one-and-a-half Mossgiel farmhouse. In the room one plain double bed, one plain table, three plain strong wooden chairs, one three-leg stool — all the circumstances indicative of straightened means. Rush candle, of weak light, burns on table. Branchlet of holly lies on table. Robert Burns and his brother Gilbert discovered entering—in earnest colloquy — Gilbert expostulating.

GILBERT: Robert, Robert, canna some ither turn be tried?

ROBERT: Nane sae handy and sae meet to pack aff Peacock.

GILBERT: But —

ROBERT: But what, Gilbert? Peacock is tipped here tonight, and may drap on us ony moment.

GILBERT: But to hae Robert dead, even though a sham!

ROBERT: Just a forecast for Robert dying.

GILBERT: Robert, Robert, the parting be sair enough, withoutten your death-scene.

ROBERT: Nae time, Gilbert, for the ass atween twa bundles of hay. At the sight of a corpse Peacock's infirmity, as ye know, taks a fit. Press my parting griefs up to whare he kens me dead. I gae to make ready my bier, wi' candle, and winding-sheet, and draping weeds, and mourners a', for his admittance. It will tend, fire fighting fire, to soothe the melancholy fiend within my breast. (*Exit Robert Burns*). (*Gilbert in manifestations of grief.*)

GILBERT (*in grief soliloquy*): Tomorrow my brither Robert leaves for Greenock and the West Indies — if he can outwit the officers — hounded out of his beloved Scotland! Woe's me for the family wi' my brither awa'. His leaving gies a fell blow. Alack, alack, for that Jean Armour scrape!

It has uncoupled at his heels the merciless pack of the law. The lee-lang week he has been dodging the officers frae covert to covert, under a' the terrors of a jail, hiding in the woods by day, and in barns by night.

(Pause — manifestations of grief.)

Robert awa', and what, good Heavens, shall we do! The harvest is flat and debt gaeing up. Gently treated, we might warstle through our difficulties. But the laird's brutal scoundrel of a factor is sending insolent, threatening letters, settin' us a' in tears. Now Robert leaves, and what, in God's name, shall we do?

(Gilbert draws a paper from his pocket and attentively regards it, as he walks up and down the room. Once or more he stops and takes seat at table, to make some change or correction. Then, paper in hand and walking up and down, continues the soliloquy.)

GILBERT: Robert gone and what's to become of us! *(Grief demonstrations)* Nane sae good wi' plow and flail. The harvest a failure on this cold, stiff soil — debt gaeing up — the factor threatening — and Robert awa'! In God's name, what's to become of mither and a'! Mossgiel farm must be surrendered. Nae hope, nae hope! New tenants must come; and they shall know, ay! *they shall know the glory of this room!*

(Gilbert tacks to wall the strip of paper he has been handling — then reads it aloud, as he looks at it):

GILBERT: At a small plain table in this middle attic of the Mossgiel farm house, by the flickering light of a rush candle, under circumstances of drudgery and want, seven pounds a year limiting his personal expenses, Robert Burns, of nights, corrected, finished up, and wrote out the memorable poems and sangs that took shape in his beautiful mind, as he followed the plow or swung the scythe.

(Enter Peacock, the bailiff.)

GILBERT (*surprised*): Wha be ye?

PEACOCK: Johnnie Peacock.

GILBERT: And why be Johnnie Peacock here at such an hour?

PEACOCK: Was told down stairs Robert Burns was up here,
hae urgent business wi' him, and wad be glad to see him.

GILBERT (*stalwart and blunt of speech*): Nae doubt, nae doubt.

Sae wad I.

(*Pause.*)

PEACOCK: This be Gibbie Burns?

GILBERT: Sae coofs name me. Wi' gentles it be Gilbert.

(*Pause.*)

PEACOCK: Robert's brither?

GILBERT: I hae an ancient and rooted opinion of that fashion,
on mither's testimony.

PEACOCK: Safe limb to hang pedigree opinions on.

GILBERT: Ay, ay — safer than some limbs of the law, wi' a
spirit to hang and quarter.

(*Pause.*)

PEACOCK: Isna this Robert Burns' room?

GILBERT: Naeboddy's else.

PEACOCK: Yours, too, be it na?

GILBERT: Naeboddy's else.

PEACOCK: Sae ye mak yoursel' a naeboddy — eh?

GILBERT: Ay, ay — I be a naeboddy, a naeboddy sangster.

(*Sings.*)

I hae a wife o' my ain —
I'll partake wi' naeboddy.
I'll tak cuckold frae nane;
I'll gie cuckold to naeboddy.

I hae a penny to spend;
There — thanks to naeboddy.
I hae naething to lend;
I'll borrow frae naeboddy.

I am naeboddy's lord;
 I'll be slave to naeboddy.
 I hae a guid broad sword;
 I'll tak' dunts frae naeboddy.

(The singer, as he sings, moves up and down the room. At the word "dunts" he is near the Bailiff, and the staff in his hand is made to whirl and whiz in close proximity to the Bailiff's head, which dodges away.)

I'll be merry-and free;
 I'll be sad for naeboddy.
 If naeboddy care for me,
 I'll care for naeboddy.

(Pause.)

PEACOCK: Robert Burns isna in — eh?

GILBERT: Canna ye see for yousel'? Ye hae one ee that seems to serve ye weel. The cat has twa the very color.

PEACOCK: Yes, I can see for mysel'. I hae na lookit under that *(peering at bed)*.

(He advances toward bed. Gilbert steps in his way, to stop him, saying.)

GILBERT: Na, na! Nae good, and risky.

PEACOCK: Ye told me to see for mysel', and I be, too, one wi' authority. Losh, man, I must look.

GILBERT *(stepping aside)*: Aweel — as ye will, man.

(As the Bailiff stoops and lifts the hanging cover, a deep fierce growl startles him. In the sudden effort to rise, under the circumstances, the little man tumbles over backward, as a powerful collie rushes out. Gilbert seizes and holds the collie by its collar.)

GILBERT *(to the collie, releasing dog)*: Back, Luath, back to your place. *(Collie retires under bed.)* *(To Bailiff)* Didna I warn ye? Ye hae found Robert's dog, if no Robert.

PEACOCK: He may be there, too (*pointing to bed.*) He has writ about "Twa Dogs," friendly and gaeing thegither.

GILBERT: Ha, ha, ha! Tak' the risk, and the Lord hae mercy on thee.

(*Pause.*)

PEACOCK: They told me Robert Burns was up here.

GILBERT: And in tears, did they na?

(*Pause — Peacock looking around mystified.*)

PEACOCK: In *weeds* — if na in tears. — And there — I see yours (*observing crape on Gilbert's arm*). Can he be dead?

GILBERT (*intense, and in exaggerated declamatory style, to carry out the design against Peacock*): Wadna that throw ye on beam ends, if ye knew Robert? We're a' in tears. Lord! has na the poor billie been taxed enough to mak' him dead? A *poor* billie! Ay, ay — his station cast by the fates in the verriest shades of life, and, against cherished ambitions, held there by the fates — and yet wi' a spark of nature's fire worth top-notch above these college dons. What, onyhow, be a' the jargon of their schools, their Latin names for horns and stools, if honest nature made them fools, wi' brains confused in college classes, wha gae in colts and come out asses? Sae richly gifted, this rustic born — yet sae suppressed, sae depressed — the buds of ambition blighted in his low dark shades of life! Bitter, bitter! What wonder, if this peculiar, agonizing soul of sensibility be dead, *dead, DEAD?*

(*Peacock recalls the monition of Nannie Brice.*)

GILBERT: And what wound to Robert's glowing Scots heart, to think of saying fareweel to dear auld Scotland, hasting, wi' wind and storm, to a far distant shore, whare, unknown, unlamented, his ashes wad rest, and joy wad revisit his bosom nae more!

(*Pause.*)

And that sacred precinct, Scotland's centre, the bonny

banks of Ayr, what ties, what ties, bind Robert there! Didna the Muses breathe upon him there? Didna Coila, his native district Muse, even frae his natal hour cherish him there? Ah! it breaks his heart, these ties to tear, to fareweel the bonny banks of Ayr!

(Pause. Gilbert's exceeding intensity, and air, and eye, fascinate Peacock, as if casting a species of spell.)

GILBERT: The bonny banks of Ayr! And that ither tie binding Robert there! Was ever lover sae possessed, and wi' small wonder — she, the sweetest flower in a' west Scotland? Whare was he wont to bide the tryst wi' Jean? On these bonny banks of Ayr! Mustna he frae her be torn, bleeding frae ilka heart-fibre, as he breaks awa'? Alas! these ties, these ties he now must tear — adieu to bonny banks of Ayr!

(Pause. Fascination deepens.)

GILBERT: As for mysel', oh Heavens! my friend and brither, like thee whare shall I find anither — the wide world round (*intense grief manifestations*)? He was my billie, dam, and sire! He's gone, he's gone, he's frae us torn, the aye best fellow e'er was born. Frae mine een the drappin' rain must ever flow, and weep the aye best fellow's fate e'er lived below!

(Pause. Peacock's countenance troubled.)

GILBERT: Johnnie Peacock, O Johnnie, ye look ye're wi' me in this affliction. Forgive my roughness just now. Mistook ye for one of those uncircumcized Philistines, out wi' warrant for Robert. Amen, I tell ye, Johnnie, the poor billie has felt misfortune's cold nor'west, lang mustering up a bitter blast; and now, on tap of a', he's taken awa'. Can ye wonder we're a' in tears?

(Pause.)

GILBERT: Ay, ay, he's up here, as they told ye. Hae ye ever seen Robert?

PEACOCK: Na.

GILBERT: Come! Ye shall see him.

(Pause — Peacock frightened.)

PEACOCK: Na, na — if he be dead.

GILBERT: Come, come! He be sleeping in the next room.

(Curtain, dropping a moment, rises on death scene. Room darkened and in sables. In centre, catafalque upholstered in white. Upon it a corpse covered by white sheet. Light focused on head of corpse. Round about catafalque mourners seen in weeds. Gilbert Burns and Peacock standing by catafalque.)

GILBERT: You can see Robert now *(from head of corpse turning back sheet.)*

(With thrilling cry Peacock faints and falls before ghastly countenance. Gilbert shoulders Peacock and makes exit to right. Curtain, dropping a moment, rises on original scene. Enter Gilbert Burns from right. Enter Robert Burns from left.)

ROBERT *(serious air)*: Whare is he?

GILBERT: Speeding to Pastor Auld's and his Old Light fellows, awaiting the Bailiff's report.

ROBERT: Recovered sae soon?

GILBERT: Restoratives, for the occasion, acted promptly.

ROBERT: Bearer of joy, nae doubt.

GILBERT: This warrant bearer — ay, ay, now a bearer of joy, that the arch enemy's *death* warrant, wi' his ain eyes, he has seen executed.

ROBERT: He invited a fright.

GILBERT: 'Tis to be hoped he pockets the fee sae fat, before the bag lets slip the cat.

ROBERT: Johnnie is a canty sort of billie, and I wish him weel, despite the chase. In the incognito alliance I hae jollied — one of the few jollies that happen to my lot.

GILBERT: But you're sae intense, Robert, that one of yours matches mony of ours.

ROBERT: Some draps of joy, wi' draughts of ill between.

(Long pause, — Robert buried in reflection. His colloquy with Gilbert marked by profound dejection of spirits, with outbursts.)

ROBERT: To Peacock, Gilbert, you have just preached my funeral, wi' equal truth, eloquence, and inflection. I am dead. The dummy is my faithful representative. You have renewed a' the anguish of my soul. Billows (*burst of excitement*) rage again — gales blow hard — storm of care and grief in wild fury sweeps over me. Hail (*transport*) thou gloomy night, meet companion of my spirit! Hail thou howling winter that muffles up his cloak and binds the mire like a rock! Chilly grief my life-blood freezes!

Fell despair my fancy seizes!

(Gilbert weeps.)

GILBERT: Woe's me, my dear brither! I should hae known better. It was to carry out your ain idea, to scare the Bailiff awa'.

ROBERT: You drew such a picture.

GILBERT: The expression of my ain deep grief, my dear brither — a flood I couldna repress.

(Pause.)

ROBERT: I am ready to bid the world good night. The hour moves me.

GILBERT: I know, Robert, I know. It must. I am deeply deeply moved mysel'. Ilka moment my thoughts be upon your leaving us. I canna divert them.

(Pause.)

ROBERT: What solace for a soul, Gilbert, in a world 'gainst peace in constant arms — life a galling load — itsel' a disease?

GILBERT: I wot of but one relief.

ROBERT: And what is that?

GILBERT: A correspondence fixed wi' Heaven.

ROBERT: Has the cry been heard?

(Pause.)

ROBERT: Wi' those friends down stairs, to say me good-bye,
I ran on just now over the death-scene. Surface play,
Gilbert. Within, the eve of leaving crushes me. I repeat
recent lines to a friend:

You think I'm glad — Oh! I pay weel
For a' the joy I borrow.
In solitude (then, then I feel)
I canna to mysel' conceal
My deeply-ranklin' sorrow.

Fareweel! Within thy bosom free
A sigh may whiles awaken,
A tear may wet thy laughin' ee
For Scotia's son, once gay like thee,
Now hopeless, comfortless, forsaken!

(Pause. Gilbert in tears.)

GILBERT: The present moment, Robert, wi' a' its load, is our
ain. The next we never saw. It may hold something.

ROBERT: Time canna aid me. My griefs are immortal. I
hae turned my een to behold madness and folly, and too
often shaken hands wi' their intoxicating friendship.

GILBERT: Whose page, Robert, is spotless?

ROBERT: 'Tis Robert wha sits and counts his sins by chapters.

(Pause.)

GILBERT: Life is a struggle and a trial, Robert, and should
it na be sae accepted by us?

ROBERT: True — the canniest way the strife is sair. To
some, made up like mysel', *intensely* sair. There is, Gil-
bert, as ye know too weel, a foggy atmosphere native to

my soul in the hour of trial, like these days of toil-beat nerves and tear-worn ee, making the dreary objects seem larger than the life. Extreme sensibility, irritated and prejudiced on the gloomy side by a series of misfortunes and disappointments at that period of my existence, whan the soul be laying in her cargo of ideas for the voyage of life, — this is, I believe, the chief cause of my unhappy gloom of mind, melancholy marking me for her ain.

(Pause.)

ROBERT: One light breaks through the gloom.

GILBERT: Thank God for that, though I dinna know what.

ROBERT: Jean, wha is sae dear to me, I hae joyously met in my hidings, smoothing it a'. It was a hasty hazard half-hour, but wi' golden minutes, on angel wings, flying o'er us; for the dear girl I love to distraction.

GILBERT: And thank God for that, too. And God grant ye back frae the Indies wi' cash to happily establish ye.

ROBERT: If na to die there — buried there — all forgetting — all forgot — trod in the mire and out of sight!

GILBERT: Na, na, na, Robert. Why na *ye*, whan sae mony hae won there?

ROBERT: Ah! Gilbert, Gilbert, never was I a knave, but hae been a fool a' my life, never weighing moves, and, despite a' efforts, now plainly see I never shall be wise, or a gatherer of gear.

GILBERT: Enough, onyhow, God grant, for the sweet simple life, wi' real wants sae few.

ROBERT: And sae few to cast anchor there.

GILBERT: Ay, ay, ranting round in pleasure's ring and blinded.

ROBERT: Wi' here and there a random sting, but, God knows, little minded.

(Pause — Robert Burns buried in reflection.)

ROBERT: How long hae I lived, and how much lived in vain!

(*Pause.*)

GILBERT: Muster cheer, Robert, muster cheer. Crowned by the fame your grand gifts must yet bring, shouldna anither light, Robert, be breaking?

ROBERT: Grand gifts, indeed!

GILBERT: Yes, Robert, grand gifts. Dinna they interpret the depths of Scotland's peasant heart? Mustna these beautiful sangs and pieces yet fill Caledonia's ear, giving ye a name? I forecast in ye the Bard of Scotland, and thrice happy that Bard should be, and blest!

ROBERT: Grand gifts, indeed! You want, Gilbert, my hair-brained imagination, my social and amorous madness, and eternal propensity to fall in love; but in gifts worth the name, in good sense and ilka sober qualification, I hold you to be by far my superior.

GILBERT: But what, again, of your bardie gifts? The brilliant glimpses ye hae given must yet hae a perfect day. See! I hae brought a branchlet of holly (*taking up the holly from table*) to crown ye, ere ye gang awa', the *Bard o' Scotland!*

ROBERT (*intense manner*): Awa' wi' the poet's leaves! Awa'! awa'! awa'! I despair, Gilbert, of ever making a figure in this world. I am no formed either for the bustle of the busy or the flutter of the gay. Into such scenes never again shall I be capable of entering. I have nursed ambitions, but they are vanishing. To all aspiring thoughts of this life I am becoming dead. I am in the slough o' despond, want-stricken and desperate, hunted day and night by the myrmidons o' the law, and ticketed an exile frae my native land, my box even now, as ye know, being at Greenock for shipment to Jamaica. That poverty and obscurity nae doubt await me, I foresee. Prospects for me! Na! Na!

— Backward I cast my ee
 On prospects drear;
 And forward, though I canna see,
 I guess and fear.

As for poesy, half mad, half fed, half clad, by the Eternal
 I am ready to swear, that henceforth I will be rhyme-
 proof, till —

GILBERT (*interrupting with great energy*): Robert! Robert!
 my brither! crush that rash, infant oath, and come! tak'
 the bed ye sairly need.

ROBERT: Nae bed till midnight and the Bailiff's hour gone.
 Peacock may get instructions frae Pastor Auld that per-
 haps he has been tricked, and return. I'll nap it here at
 my seat. Tak' the light to the kitchen and keep watch.

(*Exit Gilbert Burns with rush-light.*)

(*Robert Burns falls asleep on his chair with head resting on
 arms crossed on the table. His bonnet and the holly
 branchlet lie near him on table. In the darkened room, the
 Poet's form just visible, a light slowly develops, focused on
 the Bard. Presently, out of the midst of it, the outlines of a
 weird form gradually appear; and finally, with the mystic
 hand of blessing hovering over the Bard's head, a voice is
 heard.*)

All hail! my own inspiréd Bard!
 In me thy native Muse regard;
 Nor longer mourn thy fate is hard,
 Thus poorly low!
 I come to give thee such reward
 As we bestow.

Know, the great genius of this land
 Has many a light aerial band,
 Who, all beneath his high command,
 Harmoniously,
 As arts or arms they understand,
 Their labors ply.

They Scotia's race among them share;
Some fire the soldier on to dare;
Some rouse the patriot up to bare
 Corruption's heart;
Some teach the bard, a darling care,
 The tuneful art.

Some, bounded to a district-space,
Explore at large man's infant race,
To mark the embriotic trace
 Of rustic bard,
And careful note each opening grace,
 A guide, a guard.

Of these am I, Coila my name,
And this district as mine I claim.
Where once the Campbells, chiefs of fame,
 Held ruling power,
I mark'd thy embryo-tuneful flame,
 Thy natal hour.

With future hope I oft would gaze,
Fond, on thy little early ways,
Thy rudely caroll'd, chiming phrase,
 In uncouth rhymes,
Fired at the simple, artless lays
 Of other times.

I saw thee seek the sounding shore,
Delighted with the dashing roar;
Or, when the north his fleecy store
 Drove through the sky,
I saw grim nature's visage hoar
 Struck thy young eye.

Or, when the deep green-mantled earth,
 Warm, cherish'd every floweret's birth,
 And joy and music pouring forth
 In every grove,
 I saw thee eye the general mirth
 With boundless love.

When youthful love, warm, blushing, strong,
 Keen-shivering shot thy nerves along,
 Those accents, grateful to thy tongue,
 Th' adoréd name,
 I taught thee how to pour in song,
 To soothe thy flame.

I taught thy manners painting strains,
 The loves, the ways, of simple swains,
 Till now, o'er all my wide domains
 Thy fame extends,
 And some, the pride of Coila's plains,
 Become thy friends.

Thou canst not learn, nor can I show,
 To paint with Thomson's landscape glow;
 Or wake the bosom-melting throe,
 With Shenstone's art;
 Or pour, with Gray, the moving flow
 Warm on the heart.

Yet all beneath the unrivall'd rose
 The lowly daisy sweetly blows.
 Though large the forest's monarch throws
 His army shade,
 Yet green the juicy hawthorn grows
 Adown the glade.

Then never murmur nor repine,
 Strive in thy humble sphere to shine,
 And, trust me, not Potosi's mine,
 Nor king's regard,
 Can give a bliss o'er matching thine —
 A Rustic Bard.

To give my counsels all in one:
 Thy tuneful flame still careful fan —
 Preserve the dignity of man,
 With soul erect —
 And trust the universal plan
 Will all protect.

(As the voice ceases, the hand lifts the holly from the table and binds it on the Bard's head, and immediately the bright light and the form vanish. At the same instant a bustle in the kitchen below arouses the sleeper. He raises his head, then stands erect, looks around in a dazed condition, and exclaims)

ROBERT (*profoundly stirred*): My God! What a vision has passed! What a wondrous light! What glorious words! What (*feels holly upon his head*)!! The holly binding my brow!!

(He pauses — then looking heavenward with arms uplifted, in a transport of feeling again exclaims):

Ye Powers celestial and Guardians divine, I have heard a voice!!! Thy will be done!!!

GILBERT (*rushing in with a light, and on his heels a press of friends from below stairs, all greatly excited*): Here's a letter, Robert, just in frae Edinburgh. The bearer says he was told it's important and must be delivered at once. Guid news! guid news! nae doubt.

(Robert Burns reads letter with joyful countenance — then breaks out):

ROBERT: Your hand, my Brither! (*Hands wrung.*) A kiss, my Brither! (*Salute each other.*) Your arms, my Brither! (*They embrace.*) Verily, Gilbert, the prospect brightens. Dr. Blacklock, the blind poet, now resident in Edinburgh, here writes (*extending hand with letter*) to a friend of mine, advising me strongly to visit the Capital, assuring me of a warm welcome frae the wits and bloods there, and expressing a confident opinion, that I wad hae little difficulty in securing by subscriptions to a new and profitable edition of my poems. In verra truth, my Brither, the prospect brightens. As I slept just now I had a glorious vision, a peep upon my after road, and here is the waking counter-part. Heaven be praised! Send, Gilbert, for that chest at Greenock. I'll say guid night and guid bye to Mither and a', and by the red cock's crow, before the Bailiff's hour, shall be aff afoot for Edinburgh.

CURTAIN

ACT IV

ACT IV

Scene: Salon of the Duchess of Gordon, Edinburgh. Evening.
A soireé.

The reports of the Ayrshire Bard that had preceded his arrival at the Capital, had stirred all ranks of society. The greatest curiosity was manifested to meet him.

The salon scene is brilliant — authors, scholars, church dignitaries, men of affairs, nobles with their rank insignia, high-born ladies in jewels and plumes, the grandeur of Scotland, assembled to do honor to the Plowman Bard.

The guests move about among themselves in animated conversation and expectant air.

In front, a group of scholars discuss the Bard.

PROFESSOR STEWART: The Bard tarries. The Duchess of Gordon has assembled here a brilliant company, to do him honor. Why, Dr. Blair, it's nearly an hour (*investigating watch*) past his appointed arrival, as the Duchess informs me.

REV. DR. BLAIR: Professor Stewart must be aware, that a social lion means uncertain hours. He cannot be expected to be as punctual as the Professor's students. Our Bard is fairly in the swim. To have Burns at the festivities of the 400 is now the correct thing. At one of these they may be detaining him.

PROFESSOR STEWART: The interest he excites appears amazing. The greatest curiosity is manifested to meet him. Edinburgh actually is in a state of excitement. Dr. Blair has a more accurate finger on the social pulse. Am I, sir, exaggerating?

REV. DR. BLAIR: I do not think so. He is reported overwhelmed with attentions. I understand, Gentlemen, that, to secure him, it is necessary to bespeak his company a week in advance.

PROFESSOR STEWART: As a friend of mine expresses it, cards to invite fly by thousands each night.

REV. DR. BLAIR: So thick, I hear, that an evening's entertainment oftentimes is multiple — an hour here, an hour there, an hour yonder.

PROFESSOR STEWART: And covering, in too many instances, as Dr. Blair's censorship may have heard, the entire night.

REV. DR. BLAIR: Yes — and I fear some of these entertainments do not forecast well for the Bard. He is no enemy, it seems, to John Barleycorn, and, in pushing the bottle, is said to be ready to test the strength of the stoutest Bacchus among us.

DR. ROBERTSON: One of these entertainments, I am told, is to come off tonight. That is, if the Bard can keep all his engagements. He takes tea this evening with Sir William Forbes — has pledged his word to the Duchess, as she tells me, to be here for half hour or so — and goes hence to attend a Ball in his honor by the Caledonian Hunt.

PROFESSOR STEWART: What, Dr. Robertson, is this other entertainment?

DR. ROBERTSON: An affair of the Bachelors' Club, as I hear.

PROFESSOR STEWART: A wild, revelling set — seasoned fellows at pushing the bottle, or gathering round the bowl.

DR. ROBERTSON: He has met the Club before, and a member informed me took them absolutely off their feet by his splendid flashes. They have arranged, I believe, to point the present affair by rendering some of his convivial songs.

PROFESSOR STEWART: I can well believe the report, that the Bard's wild humor, and brilliant, daring wit, make him the idol on these festive occasions.

REV. DR. BLAIR: And I feel bound, Gentlemen, to repeat my fear that, should he get thick with these fellows, they

may succeed in embarking him on a tide of dissipation. The Club's reputation is notorious.

PROFESSOR STEWART: It may be this Club affair that is detaining him.

DR. ROBERTSON: Perhaps so. I don't know whether he is to meet the Club before or after his visit here.

PROFESSOR STEWART: They may be detaining him at Sir William Forbes'. The Banker is a charming host, and not an — (*Sounds, as of persons approaching, are heard outside the door. Conversation interrupted, and all turn expectant toward the door.*)

REV. DR. BLAIR: There he is!

(*Enter usher.*)

USHER (*announcing guests*): Miss Burnett, and the Earl of Monboddo.

(*Enter guests — exit usher.*)

MR. ERSKINE: My Reverend friend (*turning to Dr. Blair, the popular Edinburgh preacher*) is not a safe guesser — at least for these lower regions. He appears better in forecasting the futures of saints and sinners.

GROUP: Ha! ha! ha!

MR. ERSKINE: Well, Gentlemen — to take up our thread — should the Bard unhappily become an enemy to himself, already has he done enough to charm and instruct others.

REV. DR. BLAIR: Alas! Mr. Erskine, the hapless fate of too many of the great ones of earth.

PROFESSOR STEWART: There is one danger, Gentlemen, antecedently highly probable, which our Bard has escaped.

REV. DR. BLAIR: What's that?

PROFESSOR STEWART: The danger of losing his head in the midst of all this lionizing.

REV. DR. BLAIR: Strange, most strange indeed, how he stands it! In a dazzling blaze of favor, escorting jeweled dames over scented carpets to banquet-halls and tables

loaded with gold and silver, it is a marvel, how this young ploughman from Ayrshire deports himself. His bearing far surpasses all expectations.

PROFESSOR STEWART: Gentlemen, Gentlemen, I regard the circumstances of the advent of Burns among the sages and nobles of Edinburgh as being one of the most singular phenomena in modern literature.

MR. ALLISON: Yes, the wits and bloods of the Capital looked to see a green peasant rhmyster from the country-side, gifted by nature, as his verses show, but whose rustic ways and abashed address in the novel, untried presence of the *beau monde* would afford amusement.

GROUP: Ha! ha! ha!

REV. DR. BLAIR: A notion generally entertained, Mr. Allison.

MR. ALLISON: Instead, what do we find? Verily, one who is "a man for a' that," a marvel indeed under the circumstances, cool and undazzled amidst the brilliant lights of the Capital, his air totally devoid of embarrassment, his address manly and independent, perfectly well-bred, elegant in its simplicity, and winning in the free, unfettered, native play of the emotions.

REV. DR. BLAIR: In truth, Gentlemen, I regard Robert Burns as giving an earnest of being rated the most remarkable man of the age — a noble of original patent — with ease and unchallenged authority holding title direct from nature — and checking any insolence of condescension.

MR. ALLISON: For that matter, indeed, a glance from the Bard's flashing eyes alone would suffice to check such insolence.

DR. ROBERTSON: True, very true. Of course, Gentlemen, you must have noticed his eye, his fine dark eye, full of ardor and intelligence. Never have I seen its like in the head of any other human being. It is the capital index

of his genius, and fairly *glows*. I know of no other word to express it. When the Poet is aroused, his eye literally glows, an orb of fire!

PROFESSOR STEWART: Ah! Gentlemen, if —

(Sounds outside, as of parties approaching the door, again heard. Conversation interrupted. All eyes toward door.)

REV. DR. BLAIR: There he is now no doubt! He is over-due in filling here a distinguished engagement.

(Enter usher.)

USHER *(announcing guest)*: The venerable and venerated Adam Fergusson.

MR. ERSKINE: My comment, Gentlemen, on the incident, is: A mighty good guest, but a mighty bad guesser.

GROUP: Ha! ha! ha!

MR. ERSKINE: Blessing, not guessing, evidently is our Reverend friend's role.

GROUP: Ha! ha! ha!

PROFESSOR STEWART: Well, Gentlemen, while the Bard keeps us expecting him, we may go on dissecting him.

GROUP: Ha! ha! ha!

PROFESSOR STEWART: Appreciatively, I mean — brain and heart being special points of observation. — I was about to remark just now, that if the Poet carried no other arrows in his quiver, a flash from his tongue would suffice to wither any airs of condescension approaching him.

MR. ALLISON: I can recall very vividly some instances. Upon the demands of occasion his tongue becomes a wonderfully keen weapon.

REV. DR. BLAIR: As to that, Gentlemen, in every field of exercise the Bard's tongue is a tongue indeed. His mind lifts and illuminates all it touches. On themes within his range his brilliancy of fancy, glow of sentiment, richness of thought, and strength and vehemence of expression, make you grand scholars second fiddlers

GROUP: Ha! ha! ha!

MR. ERSKINE: If Dr. Blair will allow, there is a parallel here with the "Child in the Temple, sitting in the midst of the Doctors," and astonishing all by his understanding and answers.

GROUP: Hear! Hear!

DR. ROBERTSON: His conversation truly is powerful, more remarkable, in my view, even than his poems.

REV. DR. BLAIR: Never have I witnessed in any one a more rapid and distinct apprehension, greater fluency of speech, or strength and brilliancy of expression.

MR. ALLISON: The attractions of his conversation certainly are extraordinary; and the sorcery, I am told, is complete on festive occasions, when the Bard allows a free rein, the roar and the tear being equally at his bidding.

MR. ERSKINE: I am unable to speak of his colloquial powers, having been but once and for a few moments in his company, but, regarding his poetical productions as a whole, certes I can add my suffrage touching their extraordinary merit.

PROFESSOR STEWART: A notable feature is the wonderful hold they have upon all classes. I was down in Ayrshire recently, few days after the appearance of the Kilmarnock edition. It was a revelation to the lowlands of Scotland. Everybody, from cot-house to castle, was reading, repeating, singing, laughing over, the verses. I have been analyzing this hold with the view of discovering the secret supporting it.

REV. DR. BLAIR: And with what result?

PROFESSOR STEWART: I find it in the —

(Sounds ouside, as of persons approaching door again, heard. Conversation interrupted, and all turn toward the door.)

REV. DR. BLAIR: I'll lay a wager we have the Bard this time!

MR. ERSKINE: At what figure, Dr. Blair?

REV. DR. BLAIR: Why, sir, a sovereign for the poor box this Sabbath.

MR. ERSKINE: Agreed, sir.

(Enter usher.)

USHER *(announcing guest)*: Dr. John Moore, the distinguished author of "Zeluco."

GROUP: Ha! ha! ha!

(Enter guest — exit usher.)

PROFESSOR STEWART: Ah! Dr. Blair, the poor box will greet you with "a smile that won't come off."

GROUP: Ha! ha! ha!

REV. DR. BLAIR: Well, Gentlemen, I suppose I can stand it. You won't have to pass the hat round.

GROUP: Ha! ha! ha!

REV. DR. BLAIR: I am on a sharp lookout — aglow with the personality of our subject. You see my interest in the Poet *Burns*.

GROUP: Ha! ha! ha! *(At the word-play.)*

PROFESSOR STEWART: As to Dr. Blair's question—to take up the oft-severed thread — I regard the general character of the Poet's hold as being due to the genuineness, the sincerity, and so the naturalness, of his compositions. There is an absolute absence of the artificial. He represents nature, in all her variant moods, with the precision of intimacy.

REV. DR. BLAIR: Another factor, undoubtedly, is the national cast of his writings. Our literature is deficient in this attribute of nationality. We have stores of high grade works, but too few with a national spirit.

MR. ALLISON: True, quite true. Burns is an enthusiast for all that concerns the glory of Scotland, and supplies a native want; and had he entered the field of letters with his eminent powers trained and polished by a university

education, he might, in my judgment, have changed the entire course of our literature.

MR. ERSKINE: It may not be too late to risk the prediction. The final outcome of the Bard's powers has not at this hour become manifest. Burns now looms a great genius with a possibility — shall I say probability? — of ranking even with the greatest. His poems give but broken glimpses of what he is; and to pretend to limit — there, Dr. Blair! (*Interrupting outside sounds heard, as of persons approaching the door*) Will you wager again?

REV. DR. BLAIR: Yes, sir, and for the poor box, too — but this time on the negative side.

MR. ERSKINE: Very well, sir, — Done!
(*Enter usher.*)

USHER (*announcing guests*): The Earl of Glencairn, accompanied by the Poet, Mr. Robert Burns.

GROUP (*turning toward Dr. Blair*): Ha! ha! ha!

PROFESSOR STEWART: Be comforted, Dr. Blair, be comforted. We shall not forget the hat.

GROUP: Ha! ha! ha!

(*Enter guests — exit usher.*)

(*Robert Burns is seen a young man above the average height, of fine well-knit figure, and with slight plowman's stoop. His countenance is full, strong, and of uncommon interest. The black, curly hair is tied behind and spread in front upon the well-raised forehead. His plaid is a handsome red and white check of fine wool. He wears boots and buckskin breeches, and generally is dressed as a well-to-do farmer ready to dine with the laird. The company is in a state of excitement — the air electrified — the Poet a moving centre of most spirited conversation, interspersed with spontaneous smile, laughter, applause.*)

DUCHESS OF GORDON: My Lord (*to the Earl of Glencairn*), I am happy to meet you; and you likewise, Mr. Burns

(*turning to the Poet*). I regret the Duke's unexpected detention in the Highlands prevents his sharing with me the honor of your company.

POET (*his manner toward ladies being especially deferential, while easy and self-possessed*): He is to be accounted fortunate, Madam, in having so admirable a representative, and my Lord, I am sure (*turning to the Earl of Glencairn*), joins me in the sentiment.

(*The Earl bows assent.*)

LADY GORDON: Ah, sir, ever ready, as your poems happily show, to applaud the ladies, or the lassies, as you write them.

POET: In no other sphere, Madam, could my pen so fitly rave. What signifies the life of man, if 'twere na for the lassies, O? (*Hearty laughter.*)

DUCHESS: The lassies charm you, sir, into being pre-eminently the first of love poets.

POET: And certes, Madam, have I not ample warrant? The wisest man the world e'er saw, he dearly loved the lassies, O!

(*Burst of laughter.*)

DUCHESS OF GORDON: Our sex, I am sure, Mr. Burns, is deeply indebted to you. I am fain to enlarge upon the sentiment and declare, that no other poet has sung, so fully and so fitly, *the woman*, her joys and her sorrows.

POET: A simple recognition, Madam, as by truth and duty bound, of the flower of creation. As between the sexes old nature herself instructs me:

Her 'prentice hand she tried on man,
And then she made the lassies, O!

(*Hearty laughter.*)

(*Those of the company who before had met the Poet, gather about him, to greet him — covering some minutes.*)

DUCHESS OF GORDON (*drawing near with a lady*): Allow me, Mr. Burns, to make known to you Miss Burnett, of Monboddo, whose wit is equal to her personal charms.

POET: Then must it be of the rarest quality (*the Poet's eye kindling, as he bows and measures the fine figure and beautiful countenance before him*).

MISS BURNETT: I am delighted, sir, to meet Scotland's representative Poet. (*Bow from the Bard.*) The harp of the North has not been swept before by a hand so fine and varied. (*Bow from the Bard.*)

POET: The title of "Scotland's Poet," Miss Burnett, would be my greatest pride; to deserve it, my utmost ambition. Scottish scenes and Scottish story are the themes I could wish to sing. I have no dearer aim, than to have it in my power, unplagued with the routine of business (for which, Heaven knows, I am unfit enough), to make leisurely pilgrimages through Caledonia — to stand on the fields of her battles and meditate — to wander on the romantic banks of her rivers — and to muse on the stately towers, or venerable ruins, once the honored homes of her heroes.

MISS BURNETT: Others, sir, are pressing for your acquaintance. Let me have your ear long enough to express the hope that your engagements will allow you to take tea with us tomorrow evening.

POET: An accepted invitation elsewhere denies me that pleasure.

MISS BURNETT: The next evening then, sir.

POET: That pleasure, Miss Burnett, is still denied me. A week hence, if plans mature, I am off for a jaunt through North Scotland and up to that date my social hours are bespoken. Even in such a presence as this my stay, of necessity, has to be narrowed. The civilities of your city both astonish and delight me.

My breakfasts, dinings, teas, and a'
 Edina sets in style fu' braw,
 And tributes from both heart and craw
 I, present, render;
 And absent, while life's breath I draw,
 For aye shall send her.

(Ringing applause.)

MISS BURNETT: To spread her tables, sir, is the least Edina could do.

POET: That she has done so most handsomely, be assured — even without a haggis.

(Laughter.)

POET: I confess a discourtesy.

Sir Haggis should the title be,
 For great chieftain of the puddin' race is he.
 Aboon them a' he taks his place,
 The cot-house brag,
 Weel worthy of a dinner grace
 As lang's my leg.

(Burst of applause.)

EARL OF GLENCAIRN (*introducing Lord Monboddo*): My Lord Monboddo, allow me, my friend Robert Burns.

(Greetings — covering minute or more.)

EARL OF GLENCAIRN (*to Poet*): Lord Monboddo is the father of Miss Burnett, whom you have just met.

POET (*to Lord Monboddo*): My pleasure, truly. In grace and beauty what has appeared nearly like her, sir, since Milton's Eve on the day of her creation?

LORD MONBODDO: Let goodness crown that combination.

POET: Then must I name her the heavenly Burnett.

(Miss Burnett, in the press, overhears. Demonstration about her.)

EARL OF GLENCAIRN (*to Poet*): Lord Monboddo has enlarged with me on "The Jolly Beggars."

LORD MONBODDO: Understand me, Mr. Burns. I do not say that, in itself, it is the most finished, the most striking, the most beautiful — but that it is the most *predicting* of your pieces.

PROFESSOR STEWART: Yet it can give a very good account of itself. I am charmed with the variety and richness of the fancy.

LORD MONBODDO: True, very true, and it is these characteristics that, in my view, are predicting. Have you never, sir, given serious thought to more advanced dramatic composition?

POET: Some glances in that direction.

LORD MONBODDO: "The Jolly Beggars," I think, point clearly to that field as singularly appropriate to your genius.

(*Bow from Bard.*)

REV. DR. BLAIR: These musical dramas, it is said, are now the London rage.

MR. ERSKINE: Stuff, too, they are — none of poetical merit worth the name, since Sheridan's "Duenna." Simply vehicles for music and pageantry — and a special opening offers, Mr. Burns, to your remarkable gifts.

(*Bow from Bard.*)

DUCHESS OF GORDON (*in smiles*): I am opposed to these gentlemen's monopoly of comedy contributions, and offer my share in expressing unlimited confidence, that your rare abilities, Mr. Burns, could produce a comic opera deserving salute alike from Apollo and from the Muses, and withal worth a fortune.

(*Bow from Bard.*)

POET: Comedy attempted, Madam, very likely would be tragedy accomplished.

(*Laughter.*)

MR. ALLISON: For brilliant results let "The Jolly Beggars" stand as the lively infant pledge.

MISS BURNETT: On the spot I claim the naming: "The Comedy of the Salon."

POET: And on the spot I name the star. (*Smiling and bowing to Miss Burnett.*)

REV. DR. BLAIR: And divorces becoming too common, you might, Mr. Burns, *pro bono publico*, bring out some offset for wilted wives.

POET: Very well, Dr. Blair. If it be that these divorcing husbands are sighing for old-time home expression of freshness and beauty, there occurs to me, on the spot, a compensation for fading wives.

REV. DR. BLAIR: What, sir?

POET: Blooming children.

(*Burst of laughter.*)

DUCHESS OF GLENCAIRN: And as "The Comedy of the Salon," I salute the piece historically, for being, in its origin, the means of transmitting, with *eclat*, my name and house to posterity.

(*Applause, and cries of "hear!" "hear!"*)

POET: You ladies and gentlemen, so happily planning for me, are not to forget external *impedimenta*. I am told that interest and manœuvring generally become necessary to launch a drama upon the London "boards."

MR. ERSKINE: So it may be with the namby-pamby tribe of flowery scriblers; but (to take up the matter in all seriousness) were you, Mr. Burns, to write Mr. Sheridan himself, who now controls Drury Lane, inclosing a dramatic sketch, I am persuaded he would, for the honor of genius, give you a fair and candid trial.

DUCHESS OF GLENCAIRN: And a trial producing a rival of "The Rivals."

MISS BURNETT: Or its brilliant twin, "The School for Scandal."

(Laughter and applause.)

MR. ERSKINE *(to Poet)*: The Elegy, sir, on Captain Matthew Henderson very much impresses me.

POET: Ah! Mr. Erskine, I see a sameness of situation. I am told you are boiling, yet by God's grace still living and lively, boiling, sir, in the political cauldron — My Lord *(turning to the Earl of Glencairn)*, yourself is my informant. *(The Earl bows assent.)* Well, my dear sir *(to Mr. Erskine)*, as *apropos* of politicians, please allow me to say, that, on completion of that Elegy, I sent the piece to a friend who himself had been boiling in the cauldron, with a note to this effect: Now, my friend, since — for the nonce at least — you have cut the sirens of flattery, the harpies of corruption, and the furies of ambition, those fell deities, that, on all sides and in all parties, preside over the business of politics —

REV. DR. BLAIR *(to the Poet)*: A moment's interruption, sir, may it please you, to remind my friend Erskine, of the political cauldron, that, having wagered on the Poet and won, the latter, very naturally, is now returning him thanks.

(Great laughter.)

MR. ERSKINE: And honors being now easy between Dr. Blair and myself, my hat contributions, very naturally, should cease.

(Renewed laughter.)

POET: You gentlemen have introduced some gambling affair, about which happily I am ignorant, and, even if disposed to be merry over a gamble, am unable, very naturally, to be a party to the fun.

(Renewed laughter.)

EARL OF GLENCAIRN (*introducing*): Dr. Moore, this is my countryman, my shireman, my neighbor-man, and my friend, Robert Burns.

(*Greetings, supposed to cover several minutes.*)

POET: Let me thank you, and again thank you, Dr. Moore, for the honor done me, in sending your book "Zeluco," and indeed furthermore for the letter accompanying.

DR. MOORE: A trifle, to beguile your leisure.

POET: Verily, sir, I must dissent. In common with the world I am highly pleased with the Story; but to regard the sending as a mark of the author's esteem, is a superior gratification. Again I thank you, sir, for book and for letter.

DR. MOORE (*smiling*): I am yet to thank the Poet for the reply.

POET: But, my dear sir, you imposed such a task, an expression of opinion. I must needs consider, and reply halted between purpose and resolve.

DR. MOORE: I withdraw any thought of challenge.

POET: My dear Dr. Moore, I am no graduate in criticism, I assure you. I know only what pleases me, often without being able to tell why.

DR. MOORE: A fundamental test, warm and simple, and far safer, in my judgment, than the frigid formal rules of mere scholarship.

POET: By that test — my own — I am glad to say, that "Zeluco" has been read, and again read, the minutes "winging their way wi' pleasure." You remind me of Fielding. Original strokes that strongly depict —

(*The Poet is interrupted by the Duchess, especially desirous to introduce "Mrs. Dunlop of Dunlop," who has just been received.*)

DUCHESS OF GORDON (*graciously addressing the Poet and Dr. Moore*): Social urgency must needs break in upon you

gentlemen. Since Mr. Burns' further engagements this evening limit his stay here, and because he has many yet to meet, I have decreed, in a role of a king of the Medes and Persians, to limit his holdings. Despotic ruling, Mr. Burns, isn't it?

POET: The despot's rule, Madam, is blest, when the despot is perfect.

(Applause.)

POET: A figure, then, of God himself, who thence is justified
Despot Supreme.

(Renewed applause.)

DR. MOORE: True, Madam. These individual monopolies should be short — short as a hungry grace before meat. What wish would your Grace prefer?

DUCHESS OF GORDON: A moment's interruption for an introduction.

DR. MOORE: Unanimously carried, Madam.

DUCHESS OF GORDON (*introducing Mrs. Dunlop*): Mr. Burns, Mrs. Dunlop.

(Greetings, supposed to cover minute or more.)

DUCHESS OF GORDON: It is not the least of Mrs. Dunlop's attractions, Mr. Burns, that, by lineal descent, she holds in her veins the blood of Wallace.

(The Poet, taking a step backward and balancing the body in the startled attitude of one confronted suddenly by an object of absorbing interest, for a moment, fixes upon Mrs. Dunlop, a glowing gaze.)

POET (*with greatest animation*): Pray, Madam, pardon my manner. You call up an illustrious presence wont to hang very near my heart:

At Wallace's name what Scottish blood
But boils up in a spring-tide flood!

(Vehemence rouses applause.)

POET: You could not, Mrs. Dunlop, have touched my patriot heartcord more stirringly, than by naming the great Wallace, my glorious countryman, and your immortal ancestor. From my youth has he not been with me? One of the few books of my boyish days was "The History of Sir William Wallace," and many are the hours, when, after daily labor, I have stolen out to shed a tear over his glorious, but unfortunate story.

DR. MOORE: Hero men those days, sir.

POET: And the spirit of the hero-patriot is not lacking in ours, Dr. Moore.

DR. MOORE: I did not intend such an inference.

POET: Yes — way down in the ranks may be, true as tempered steel is he, awaiting hero opportunity.

(Applause.)

POET: There he is! I see him now at the cot-house on leave:

Just bring this Scotsman frae his hill.
 Clap in his cheek a Highland gill.
 Say, such is royal George's will,
 And there's the foe;
 He has nae thought but how to kill
 Twa at a blow.

(Great applause.)

Nae cold, faint-hearted, doubtings tease him.
 Death comes. Wi' fearless eye he sees him;
 Wi' bluidy hand a welcome gies him;
 And, when he fa's,
 His latest draught o' breathin' leaves him
 In faint huzzas!

(Spoken with fiery energy — resounding burst of applause.)
(Pause.)

POET: I am tempted, Mrs. Dunlop, to repeat the Bannockburn lines.

MRS. DUNLOP: Then, sir, you would repeat the first of heroic odes.

(Bow from Bard.)

MR. ERSKINE: Glorious — thrilling — and deserving to be sung by the throat of the whirlwind.

(Applause. As it ceases, from a curtained gallery at one end of the salon come the tones of a harp. The fingers, in prelude, stray a moment among the strings — then sweep the sounding chords, supporting a glowing voice.)

VOICE:

Scots wha hae wi' Wallace bled,
 Scots, whom Bruce has often led,
 Welcome to your gory bed,
 Or to victory!

Now's the day, and now's the hour,
 See the front o' battle lour,
 See approach proud Edward's power —
 Chains and slavery!

Wha will be a traitor nave?
 Wha can fill a coward's grave?
 Wha sae base as be a slave?
 Let him turn and flee!

Wha, for Scotland's king and law,
 Freedom's sword will strongly draw,
 Freemen stand, or freemen fa',
 Let him follow me!

By oppression's woes and pains —
 By your sons in servile chains —
 We will drain our dearest veins,
 But they shall be free!

(The inspiring words, appealing with such power to Scotland's heart, the charm of the voice, the author's presence and singular personal attraction — all combine to throw a company, already overflowing with enthusiasm, almost into an ecstasy. With the first stanza a demonstration is threatened. With each succeeding one the impulse grows — with the last irresistibly bursting forth, the company joining the singer in impassioned tones, and with tremendous effect).

ALL:

Lay the proud usurpers low!
 Tyrants fall in ev'ry foe!
 Liberty's in ev'ry blow!
 Let us do or dee!

(Wild scene follows — a rush upon the Poet, with embraces, tears, etc., etc., etc., — covering five or more minutes.)

DUCHESS OF GORDON (*pointing to Poet's lapel, where roses had been pinned*): They have despoiled your coat, sir, for salon souvenirs.

POET: The flower perishes, like “the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven.” For myself, the *souvenir* is this demonstration as a whole — overwhelming, Madam — to be kept enshrined and vivid in the memory, for ever; and in its centre that *voice*, so sweet, and, by twinship, dear, there being but one other voice like it, and that very near to me.

(The company, pressing about the Poet, become interested in the voice, and expectant.)

DUCHESS OF GORDON: The singer is a lassie, her person matching the voice — sweet, to use one of your expressions, as the dewy milk-white thorn.

POET: May I meet her?

DUCHESS OF GORDON: At the proper moment. She is here by special invitation, and chosen as artist for the occasion.

POET: Is she to appear again?

DUCHESS OF GORDON: In one of your songs, the most beautiful among your beautiful lyrics, where you single out one to exalt, breathing the true spirit of poetry, and which, like the music, will last for ever.

POET: And that, your Grace?

DUCHESS OF GORDON: Your verses on "Highland Mary."

MISS BURNETT: Most enchantingly sweet and pathetic.

MR. ERSKINE: Another glorious lyric — as high in the tender order, as Bannockburn in the heroic.

REV. DR. BLAIR: So rich in word selection, such grace, such music, in word succession, such wealth of love expression, a gem, sir, worthy a presentation to Apollo himself.

(Bow from Bard.)

(With the Poet's bow Lady Gordon gives a sign, and from the gallery the voice is heard in subdued, chastened strain of melody):

VOICE:

Ye banks, and braes, and streams around
 The castle o' Montgomery,
 Green be your woods, and fair your flowers,
 Your waters never drumlie.
 There simmer first unfaulds her robes,
 And there the langest tarry;
 For there I took the last fareweel
 Of my sweet Highland Mary.

How sweetly bloomed the gay green birk,
 How rich the hawthorn's blossom,
 As, underneath their fragrant shade,
 I clasped her to my bosom!
 The golden hours, on angel wings,
 Flew o'er me and my dearie;
 For dear to me, as life and light,
 Was my sweet Highland Mary.

Wi' mony a vow and lock'd embrace
 Our parting was fu' tender,
 And, pledging aft to meet again,
 We tore oursels asunder.
 But oh! fell death's untimely frost
 That nipt my flower sae early!
 Now green's the sod and cauld's the clay
 That wraps my Highland Mary!

Oh! pale, pale now those rosy lips
 I aft hae kiss'd sae fondly!
 And closed for aye the sparkling glance
 That dwelt on me sae kindly!
 And mouldering now in silent dust
 That heart that loved me dearly;
 But still within my bosom's core
 Shall live my Highland Mary!

(Upon the wrought-up temper of the company the effect of this enchanting song, all aglow with a lover's soul, is most extraordinary. With the first word eyes begin to mist. Upon the last, another demonstration follows. Aroused to an irrepressible pitch of tumultuous delight, the guests again overwhelm the Poet with tears, embraces, etc., etc., etc.

The confusion over, the Poet, with his characteristic unaffected simplicity and enthusiasm, addresses the company pressing around him):

POET: The subject is one of the most interesting passages in my life. I regard the lines as being in my happiest manner. Perhaps, after all, it is the still glowing prejudice of my heart that throws a borrowed lustre over the merits of the composition. She was not only beautiful, but lovely. Her form elegant. Her features not absolutely regular, but combining in a countenance of winning

sweetness, an expression of tenderness, intelligence, and a generous spirit.

(The Poet pauses — then breaks into apostrophe.)

Thou busy power, remembrance, cease, when I would turn to those scenes — scenes in strong remembrance set, scenes never, never to return.

(Poet pauses.)

Still, however dear, it is a *memory*, which these lines hallow. This voice which I hear, is living, and so touches me, because a seeming echo from “by the winding Ayr,” where, in a dear lassie, “Highland Mary,” in a figure, is restored to me.

DUCHESS OF GORDON: A *seeming* echo, Mr. Burns? Perchance it may be real.

POET: I cannot understand your Grace.

DUCHESS OF GORDON: Are you not conscious, sir, of having been the subject of a prophecy?

POET: The subject of a prophecy!

DUCHESS OF GORDON: Yes, sir.

POET: By whom — myself, or by another?

DUCHESS OF GORDON: Another, sir.

POET: Humanity, or sprite, Madam?

DUCHESS OF GORDON: A sane, safe, and charming sample of humanity, I can assure Mr. Burns.

POET: A charming prophet! Thank you, Madam — a leg to stand on. A charming prophet should not confute his character, and be a prophet of evil.

(The Duchess does not answer the implied question.)

POET: You are silent, Madam.

DUCHESS OF GORDON: The disclosing hour, sir, approaches.

POET: Lady Gordon knows more of this personal prophecy, than I myself. Truly I feel honored. I am sure she will allow me to question her information more definitely, and ask: When the fulfilment?

DUCHESS OF GORDON: This night.

POET: This night!

DUCHESS OF GORDON: Really, sir, this night.

POET: And where, pray, Madam?

DUCHESS OF GORDON: This salon!

POET: This salon!

DUCHESS OF GORDON: Yes, sir, even this salon.

(Pause — Poet puzzled — guests excited.)

POET: What is it, Madam — what meanest thou, Lady Gordon? I am in astonishment — I am bewildered amidst the happenings since reaching the Capital, and especially the maze of these demonstrations.

DUCHESS OF GORDON: The singer will explain — another Cassandra, prophesying truly, but not believed.

(Guests greatly excited.)

POET: A woman, then?

DUCHESS OF GORDON: A Lassie, whom, as I've said, I have invited hither, as artist for the occasion.

POET: You have promised I might see her.

DUCHESS OF GORDON: Yes.

POET: Where is she?

DUCHESS OF GORDON: Here.

POET *(looking around)*: Here?

DUCHESS OF GORDON: Yes — here in domino. Doubtless you will recognize her, as I lift the hood.

(“Bonnie Jean,” charming in simple attire, is now standing by Lady Gordon's side. As the latter lifts the hood, she exclaims):

JEAN: Robin, Robin, dinna ye remember?

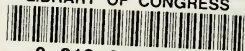
(They rush into each other's arms, amidst tumultuous applause of company.)

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