Johnson and the classicists ; but in his matter, in his sympathy for nature and human life, he belongs unmistakably to the new romantic school. Altogether he is the most versatile, the most charming, the most inconsistent, and the most lovable genius of all the literary men who made famous the age of Johnson.

Life. Goldsmith's career is that of an irresponsible, unbalanced genius, which would make one despair if the man himself did not remain so lovable in all his inconsistencies. He was born in the village of Pallas, Ireland, the son of a poor Irish curate whose noble character is portrayed in Dr. Primrose, of *The Vicar of Wakefield*, and in the country parson of *The Deserted Village*. After an unsatisfactory course in various schools, where he was regarded as hopelessly stupid, Goldsmith entered Trinity College, Dublin, as a sizar, i.e. a student who pays with labor for his tuition. By his escapades he was brought into disfavor with the authorities, but that troubled him little. He was also wretchedly poor, which troubled him less; for when he earned a few shillings by writing ballads for street singers, his money went oftener to idle beggars than to the paying of his honest debts. After three years of university life he ran away, in dime-novel fashion, and nearly starved to death before he was found and brought back in disgrace. Then he worked a little, and obtained his degree in 1749.

Strange that such an idle and irresponsible youth should have been urged by his family to take holy orders ; but such was the fact. For two years more Goldsmith labored with theology, only to be rejected when he presented himself as a candidate for the ministry. He tried teaching, and failed. Then his fancy turned to America, and, provided with money and a good horse, he started off for Cork, where he was to embark for the New World. He loafed along the pleasant Irish ways, missed his ship, and presently turned up cheerfully amongst his relatives, minus all his money, and riding a sorry nag called Fiddleback, for which he had traded his own on the way.[1] He borrowed fifty pounds more, and started for London to study law, but speedily lost his money at cards, and again appeared, amiable and irresponsible as ever, among his despairing relatives. The next year they sent him to Edinburgh to study medicine. Here for a couple of years he became popular as a singer of songs and a teller

1 Such is Goldsmith's version of a somewhat suspicious adventure, whose details are unknown.

of tales, to whom medicine was only a troublesome affliction. Suddenly the *Wanderlust* seized him and he started abroad, ostensibly to complete his medical education, but in reality to wander like a cheerful beggar over Europe, singing and playing his flute for food and lodging. He may have studied a little at Leyden and at Padua, but that was only incidental. After a year or more of vagabondage he returned to London with an alleged medical degree, said to have been obtained at Louvain or Padua.

The next few years are a pitiful struggle to make a living as tutor, apothecary's assistant, comedian, usher in a country school, and finally as a physician in Southwark. Gradually he drifted into literature, and lived from hand to mouth by doing hack work for the London booksellers. Some of his essays and his *Citizen of the World* (1760–1761) brought him to the attention of Johnson, who looked him up, was attracted first by his poverty and then by his genius, and presently declared him to be "one of the first men we now have as an author." Johnson's friendship proved invaluable, and presently Goldsmith found himself a member of the exclusive Literary Club. He promptly justified Johnson's confidence by publishing *The Traveller* (1764), which was hailed as one of the finest poems of the century. Money now came to him liberally, with orders from the booksellers ; he took new quarters in Fleet Street and furnished them gorgeously ; but he had an inordinate vanity for bright-colored clothes, and faster than he earned money he spent it on velvet cloaks and in indiscriminate charity. For a time he resumed his practice as a physician, but his fine clothes did not bring patients, as he expected ; and presently he turned to writing again, to pay his debts to the booksellers. He produced several superficial and grossly inaccurate schoolbooks, — like his *Animated Nature* and his histories of England, Greece, and Rome, — which brought him bread and more fine clothes, and his *Vicar of Wakefield*, *The Deserted Village*, and *She Stoops to Conquer*, which brought him undying fame.

After meeting with Johnson, Goldsmith became the object of Boswell's magpie curiosity ; and to Boswell's *Life of Johnson* we are indebted for many of the details of Goldsmith's life, — his homeliness, his awkward ways, his drolleries and absurdities, which made him alternately the butt and the wit of the famous Literary Club. Boswell disliked Goldsmith, and so draws an unflattering portrait, but even this does not disguise the contagious good humor which made men love him. When in his forty-seventh year, he fell sick of

a fever, and with childish confidence turned to a quack medicine to cure himself. He died in 1774, and Johnson placed a tablet, with a sonorous Latin epitaph, in Westminster Abbey, though Goldsmith was buried elsewhere. "Let not his frailties be remembered; he was a very great man," said Johnson; and the literary world — which, like that old dictator, is kind enough at heart, though often rough in its methods — is glad to accept and record the verdict.

Works of Goldsmith. Of Goldsmith's early essays and his later school histories little need be said. They have settled into their own place, far out of sight of the ordinary reader. Perhaps the most interesting of these is a series of letters for the *Public Ledger* (afterwards published as *The Citizen of the World*), written from the view point of an alleged Chinese traveler, and giving the latter's comments on English civilization.[1] The following five works are those upon which Goldsmith's fame chiefly rests:

The Traveller (1764) made Goldsmith's reputation among his contemporaries, but is now seldom read, except by students who would understand how Goldsmith was, at one time, dominated by Johnson and his pseudo-classic ideals. It is a long poem, in rimed couplets, giving a survey and criticism of the social life of various countries in Europe, and reflects many of Goldsmith's own wanderings and impressions.

The Deserted Village (1770), though written in the same mechanical style, is so permeated with honest human sympathy, and voices so perfectly the revolt of the individual man against institutions, that a multitude of common people heard it gladly, without consulting the critics as to whether they should call it good poetry. Notwithstanding its faults, to which Matthew Arnold has called sufficient attention, it has become one of our best known poems, though we cannot help wishing that the monotony of its couplets had been broken by some of the Irish folk songs and ballads that charmed street audiences in

The Deserted Village

[1] Goldsmith's idea, which was borrowed from Walpole, reappears in the pseudo *Letters from a Chinese Official*, which recently attracted considerable attention.

Dublin, and that brought Goldsmith a welcome from the French peasants wherever he stopped to sing. In the village parson and the schoolmaster, Goldsmith has increased Chaucer's list by two lovable characters that will endure as long as the English language. The criticism that the picture of prosperous "Sweet Auburn" never applied to any village in Ireland is just, no doubt, but it is outside the question. Goldsmith was a hopeless dreamer, bound to see everything, as he saw his debts and his gay clothes, in a purely idealistic way.

The Good-Natured Man and *She Stoops to Conquer* are Goldsmith's two comedies. The former, a comedy of character, though it has some laughable scenes and one laughable character, Croaker, met with failure on the stage, and has never been revived with any success. The latter, a comedy of intrigue, is one of the few plays that has never lost its popularity. Its lively, bustling scenes, and its pleasantly absurd characters, Marlowe, the Hardcastles, and Tony Lumpkin, still hold the attention of modern theater goers; and nearly every amateur dramatic club sooner or later places *She Stoops to Conquer* on its list of attractions.

The Vicar of Wakefield is Goldsmith's only novel, and the first in any language that gives to home life an enduring romantic interest. However much we admire the beginnings of the English novel, to which we shall presently refer, we are nevertheless shocked by its frequent brutalities and indecencies. Goldsmith, like Steele, had the Irish reverence for pure womanhood, and this reverence made him shun as a pest the vulgarity and coarseness in which contemporary novelists, like Smollett and Sterne, seemed to delight. So he did for the novel what Addison and Steele had done for the satire and the essay; he refined and elevated it, making it worthy of the old Anglo-Saxon ideals which are our best literary heritage.

The Vicar of Wakefield

Briefly, *The Vicar of Wakefield* is the story of a simple English clergyman, Dr. Primrose, and his family, who pass

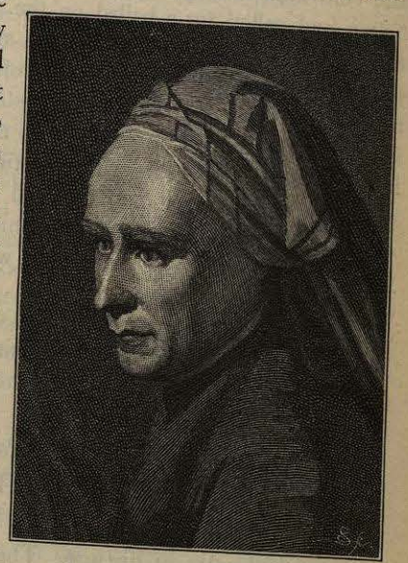
from happiness through great tribulation. Misfortunes, which are said never to come singly, appear in this case in flocks; but through poverty, sorrow, imprisonment, and the unspeakable loss of his daughters, the Vicar's faith in God and man emerges triumphant. To the very end he is like one of the old martyrs, who sings *Alleluia* while the lions roar about him and his children in the arena. Goldsmith's optimism, it must be confessed, is here stretched to the breaking point. The reader is sometimes offered fine Johnsonian phrases where he would naturally expect homely and vigorous language; and he is continually haunted by the suspicion that, even in this best of all possible worlds, the Vicar's clouds of affliction were somewhat too easily converted into showers of blessing; yet he is forced to read on, and at the end he confesses gladly that Goldsmith has succeeded in making a most interesting story out of material that, in other hands, would have developed either a burlesque or a brutal tragedy. Laying aside all romantic passion, intrigue, and adventure, upon which other novelists depended, Goldsmith, in this simple story of common life, has accomplished three noteworthy results: he has made human fatherhood almost a divine thing; he has glorified the moral sentiments which cluster about the family life as the center of civilization; and he has given us, in Dr. Primrose, a striking and enduring figure, which seems more like a personal acquaintance than a character in a book.

William Cowper (1731–1800)

In Cowper we have another interesting poet, who, like Gray and Goldsmith, shows the struggle between romantic and classic ideals. In his first volume of poems, Cowper is more hampered by literary fashions than was Goldsmith in his *Traveller* and his *Deserted Village*. In his second period, however, Cowper uses blank verse freely; and his delight in nature and in homely characters, like the teamster and the

mail carrier of *The Task*, shows that his classicism is being rapidly thawed out by romantic feeling. In his later work, especially his immortal "John Gilpin," Cowper flings fashions aside, gives Pegasus the reins, takes to the open road, and so proves himself a worthy predecessor of Burns, who is the most spontaneous and the most interesting of all the early romanticists.

Life. Cowper's life is a pathetic story of a shy and timid genius, who found the world of men too rough, and who withdrew to nature like a wounded animal. He was born at Great Berkhamstead, Hertfordshire, in 1731, the son of an English clergyman. He was a delicate, sensitive child, whose early life was saddened by the death of his mother and by his neglect at home. At six years he was sent away to a boys' school, where he was terrified by young barbarians who made his life miserable. There was one atrocious bully into whose face Cowper could never look; he recognized his enemy by his shoe buckles, and shivered at his approach. The fierce invectives of his "Tirocinium, or a Review of Schools" (1784), shows how these school experiences had affected his mind and health. For twelve years he studied law, but at the approach of a public examination for an office he was so terrified that he attempted suicide. The experience unsettled his reason, and the next twelve months were spent in an asylum at St. Alban's. The death of his father, in 1756, had brought the poet a small patrimony, which placed him above the necessity of struggling, like Goldsmith, for his daily bread. Upon his recovery he boarded for years at the house of the Unwins, cultured people who recognized the genius hidden in this shy and melancholy yet quaintly humorous man. Mrs. Unwin, in particular,



WILLIAM COWPER

cared for him as a son; and whatever happiness he experienced in his poor life was the result of the devotion of this good woman, who is the "Mary" of all his poems.

A second attack of insanity was brought on by Cowper's morbid interest in religion, influenced, perhaps, by the untempered zeal of one John Newton, a curate, with whom Cowper worked in the small parish of Olney, and with whom he compiled the famous Olney Hymns. The rest of his life, between intervals of melancholia or insanity, was spent in gardening, in the care of his numerous pets, and in writing his poems, his translation of Homer, and his charming letters. His two best known poems were suggested by a lively and cultivated widow, Lady Austen, who told him the story of John Gilpin and called for a ballad on the subject. She also urged him to write a long poem in blank verse; and when he demanded a subject, she whimsically suggested the sofa, which was a new article of furniture at that time. Cowper immediately wrote "The Sofa," and, influenced by the poetic possibilities that lie in unexpected places, he added to this poem from time to time, and called his completed work *The Task*. This was published in 1785, and the author was instantly recognized as one of the chief poets of his age. The last years of his life were a long battle with insanity, until death mercifully ended the struggle in 1800. His last poem, "The Castaway," is a cry of despair, in which, under guise of a man washed overboard in a storm, he describes himself perishing in the sight of friends who are powerless to help.

Cowper's Works. Cowper's first volume of poems, containing "The Progress of Error," "Truth," "Table Talk," etc., is interesting chiefly as showing how the poet was bound by the classical rules of his age. These poems are dreary, on the whole, but a certain gentleness, and especially a vein of pure humor, occasionally rewards the reader. For Cowper was a humorist, and only the constant shadow of insanity kept him from becoming famous in that line alone.

The Task, written in blank verse, and published in 1785, is Cowper's longest poem. Used as we are to the natural poetry of Wordsworth and Tennyson, it is hard for us to appreciate the striking originality of this work. Much of it is

conventional and "wooden," to be sure, like much of Wordsworth's poetry; but when, after reading the rimed essays and the artificial couplets of Johnson's age, we turn suddenly to Cowper's description of homely scenes, of woods and brooks, of plowmen and teamsters and the letter carrier on his rounds, we realize that we are at the dawn of a better day in poetry:

The Task

> He comes, the herald of a noisy world,
> With spatter'd boots, strapp'd waist, and frozen locks:
> News from all nations lumbering at his back.
> True to his charge, the close-packed load behind,
> Yet careless what he brings, his one concern
> Is to conduct it to the destined inn,
> And, having dropped the expected bag, pass on.
> He whistles as he goes, light-hearted wretch,
> Cold and yet cheerful: messenger of grief
> Perhaps to thousands, and of joy to some;
> To him indifferent whether grief or joy.
> Houses in ashes, and the fall of stocks,
> Births, deaths, and marriages, epistles wet
> With tears that trickled down the writer's cheeks
> Fast as the periods from his fluent quill,
> Or charged with amorous sighs of absent swains,
> Or nymphs responsive, equally affect
> His horse and him, unconscious of them all.

Cowper's most laborious work, the translation of Homer in blank verse, was published in 1791. Its stately, Milton-like movement, and its better rendering of the Greek, make this translation far superior to Pope's artificial couplets. It is also better, in many respects, than Chapman's more famous and more fanciful rendering; but for some reason it was not successful, and has never received the recognition which it deserves. Entirely different in spirit are the poet's numerous hymns, which were published in the Olney Collection in 1779, and which are still used in our churches. It is only necessary to mention a few first lines —"God moves in a mysterious way," "Oh, for a closer walk

Miscellaneous Works

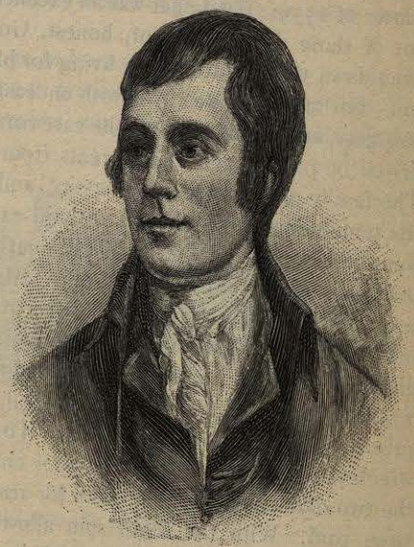
with God," "Sometimes a light surprises"—to show how his gentle and devout spirit has left its impress upon thousands who now hardly know his name. With Cowper's charming *Letters*, published in 1803, we reach the end of his important works, and the student who enjoys reading letters will find that these rank among the best of their kind. It is not, however, for his ambitious works that Cowper is remembered, but rather for his minor poems, which have found their own way into so many homes. Among these, the one that brings quickest response from hearts that understand is his little poem, "On the Receipt of My Mother's Picture," beginning with the striking line, "Oh, that those lips had language." Another, called "Alexander Selkirk," beginning, "I am monarch of all I survey," suggests how Selkirk's experiences as a castaway (which gave Defoe his inspiration for *Robinson Crusoe*) affected the poet's timid nature and imagination. Last and most famous of all is his immortal "John Gilpin." Cowper was in a terrible fit of melancholy when Lady Austen told him the story, which proved to be better than medicine, for all night long chuckles and suppressed laughter were heard in the poet's bedroom. Next morning at breakfast he recited the ballad that had afforded its author so much delight in the making. The student should read it, even if he reads nothing else by Cowper; and he will be lacking in humor or appreciation if he is not ready to echo heartily the last stanza:

> Now let us sing, Long live the King,
> And Gilpin, long live he!
> And when he next doth ride abroad
> May I be there to see.

Robert Burns (1759–1796)

After a century and more of Classicism, we noted with interest the work of three men, Gray, Goldsmith, and Cowper, whose poetry, like the chorus of awakening birds, suggests the dawn of another day. Two other poets of the same age

suggest the sunrise. The first is the plowman Burns, who speaks straight from the heart to the primitive emotions of the race; the second is the mystic Blake, who only half understands his own thoughts, and whose words stir a sensitive nature as music does, or the moon in midheaven, rousing in the soul those vague desires and aspirations which ordinarily sleep, and which can never be expressed because they have no names. Blake lived his shy, mystic, spiritual life in the crowded city, and his message is to the few who can understand. Burns lived his sad, toilsome, erring life in the open air, with the sun and the rain, and his songs touch all the world. The latter's poetry, so far as it has a philosophy, rests upon two principles which the classic school never understood, — that common people are at heart romantic and lovers of the ideal, and that simple human emotions furnish the elements of true poetry. Largely because he follows these two principles, Burns is probably the greatest song writer of the world. His poetic creed may be summed up in one of his own stanzas:



ROBERT BURNS

> Give me ae spark o' Nature's fire,
> That 's a' the learning I desire;
> Then, though I trudge thro' dub an' mire
> At pleugh or cart,
> My Muse, though hamely in attire,
> May touch the heart.

Life.[1] Burns's life is "a life of fragments," as Carlyle called it; and the different fragments are as unlike as the noble "Cotter's Saturday Night" and the rant and riot of "The Jolly Beggars." The details of this sad and disjointed life were better, perhaps, forgotten. We call attention only to the facts which help us to understand the man and his poetry.

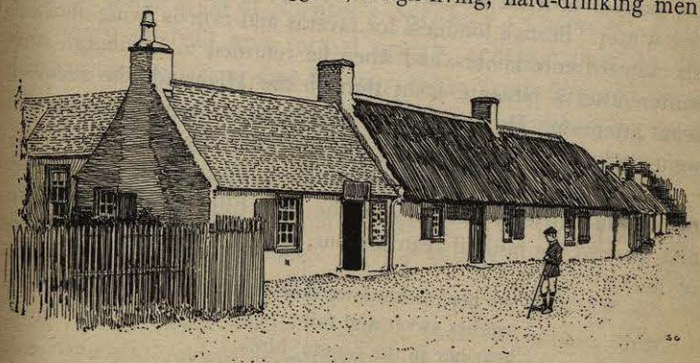
Burns was born in a clay cottage at Alloway, Scotland, in the bleak winter of 1759. His father was an excellent type of the Scotch peasant of those days, — a poor, honest, God-fearing man, who toiled from dawn till dark to wrest a living for his family from the stubborn soil. His tall figure was bent with unceasing labor; his hair was thin and gray, and in his eyes was the careworn, hunted look of a peasant driven by poverty and unpaid rents from one poor farm to another. The family often fasted of necessity, and lived in solitude to avoid the temptation of spending their hard-earned money. The children went barefoot and bareheaded in all weathers, and shared the parents' toil and their anxiety over the rents. At thirteen Bobby, the eldest, was doing a peasant's full day's labor; at sixteen he was chief laborer on his father's farm; and he describes the life as "the cheerless gloom of a hermit, and the unceasing moil of a galley slave." In 1784 the father, after a lifetime of toil, was saved from a debtor's prison by consumption and death. To rescue something from the wreck of the home, and to win a poor chance of bread for the family, the two older boys set up a claim for arrears of wages that had never been paid. With the small sum allowed them, they buried their father, took another farm, Mossgiel, in Mauchline, and began again the long struggle with poverty.

Such, in outline, is Burns's own story of his early life, taken mostly from his letters. There is another and more pleasing side to the picture, of which we have glimpses in his poems and in his Commonplace Book. Here we see the boy at school; for like most Scotch peasants, the father gave his boys the best education he possibly could. We see him following the plow, not like a slave, but like a free man, crooning over an old Scotch song and making a better one to match the melody. We see him stop the plow to listen to what the wind is saying, or turn aside lest he disturb the birds at their singing and nest making. At supper we see the family about

[1] Fitz-Greene Halleck's poem "To a Rose from near Alloway Kirk" (1822) is a good appreciation of Burns and his poetry. It might be well to read this poem before the sad story of Burns's life.

the table, happy notwithstanding their scant fare, each child with a spoon in one hand and a book in the other. We hear Betty Davidson reciting, from her great store, some heroic ballad that fired the young hearts to enthusiasm and made them forget the day's toil. And in "The Cotter's Saturday Night" we have a glimpse of Scotch peasant life that makes us almost reverence these heroic men and women, who kept their faith and their self-respect in the face of poverty, and whose hearts, under their rough exteriors, were tender and true as steel.

A most unfortunate change in Burns's life began when he left the farm, at seventeen, and went to Kirkoswald to study surveying. The town was the haunt of smugglers, rough-living, hard-drinking men;



BIRTHPLACE OF BURNS

and Burns speedily found his way into those scenes of "riot and roaring dissipation" which were his bane ever afterwards. For a little while he studied diligently, but one day, while taking the altitude of the sun, he saw a pretty girl in the neighboring garden, and love put trigonometry to flight. Soon he gave up his work and wandered back to the farm and poverty again.

When twenty-seven years of age Burns first attracted literary attention, and in the same moment sprang to the first place in Scottish letters. In despair over his poverty and personal habits, he resolved to emigrate to Jamaica, and gathered together a few of his early poems, hoping to sell them for enough to pay the expenses of his journey. The result was the famous Kilmarnock edition of Burns, published in 1786, for which he was offered twenty pounds. It is said that he even bought his ticket, and on the night before

the ship sailed wrote his "Farewell to Scotland," beginning, "The gloomy night is gathering fast," which he intended to be his last song on Scottish soil.

In the morning he changed his mind, led partly by some dim foreshadowing of the result of his literary adventure; for the little book took all Scotland by storm. Not only scholars and literary men, but "even plowboys and maid servants," says a contemporary, eagerly spent their hard-earned shillings for the new book. Instead of going to Jamaica, the young poet hurried to Edinburgh to arrange for another edition of his work. His journey was a constant ovation, and in the capital he was welcomed and feasted by the best of Scottish society. This unexpected triumph lasted only one winter. Burns's fondness for taverns and riotous living shocked his cultured entertainers, and when he returned to Edinburgh next winter, after a pleasure jaunt through the Highlands, he received scant attention. He left the city in anger and disappointment, and went back to the soil, where he was more at home.

The last few years of Burns's life are a sad tragedy, and we pass over them hurriedly. He bought the farm Ellisland, Dumfriesshire, and married the faithful Jean Armour, in 1788. That he could write of her,

> I see her in the dewy flowers,
> I see her sweet and fair;
> I hear her in the tunefu' birds,
> I hear her charm the air:
> There's not a bonie flower that springs
> By fountain, shaw, or green;
> There's not a bonie bird that sings,
> But minds me o' my Jean,

is enough for us to remember. The next year he was appointed exciseman, i.e. collector of liquor revenues, and the small salary, with the return from his poems, would have been sufficient to keep his family in modest comfort, had he but kept away from taverns. For a few years his life of alternate toil and dissipation was occasionally illumined by his splendid lyric genius, and he produced many songs —"Bonnie Doon," "My Love's like a Red, Red Rose," "Auld Lang Syne," "Highland Mary," and the soul-stirring "Scots wha hae," composed while galloping over the moor in a storm — which have made the name of Burns known wherever the English language is spoken, and honored wherever Scotchmen gather together. He died

miserably in 1796, when only thirty-seven years old. His last letter was an appeal to a friend for money to stave off the bailiff, and one of his last poems a tribute to Jessie Lewars, a kind lassie who helped to care for him in his illness. This last exquisite lyric, "O wert thou in the cauld blast," set to Mendelssohn's music, is one of our best known songs, though its history is seldom suspected by those who sing it.

The Poetry of Burns. The publication of the Kilmarnock Burns, with the title *Poems Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (1786), marks an epoch in the history of English Literature, like the publication of Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar*. After a century of cold and formal poetry, relieved only by the romanticism of Gray and Cowper, these fresh inspired songs went straight to the heart, like the music of returning birds in springtime. It was a little volume, but a great book; and we think of Marlowe's line, "Infinite riches in a little room," in connection with it. Such poems as "The Cotter's Saturday Night," "To a Mouse," "To a Mountain Daisy," "Man was Made to Mourn," "The Twa Dogs," "Address to the Deil," and "Halloween," suggest that the whole spirit of the romantic revival is embodied in this obscure plowman. Love, humor, pathos, the response to nature, — all the poetic qualities that touch the human heart are here; and the heart was touched as it had not been since the days of Elizabeth. If the reader will note again the six characteristics of the romantic movement, and then read six poems of Burns, he will see at once how perfectly this one man expresses the new idea. Or take a single suggestion, —

> Ae fond kiss, and then we sever!
> Ae farewell, and then forever!
> Deep in heart-wrung tears I'll pledge thee,
> Warring sighs and groans I'll wage thee.
> Who shall say that Fortune grieves him
> While the star of hope she leaves him?
> Me, nae cheerfu' twinkle lights me;
> Dark despair around benights me.

I'll ne'er blame my partial fancy,
Naething could resist my Nancy;
But to see her was to love her;
Love but her, and love forever.
Had we never lov'd sae kindly,
Had we never lov'd sae blindly,
Never met — or never parted —
We had ne'er been broken-hearted.

The "essence of a thousand love tales" is in that one little song. Because he embodies the new spirit of romanticism, critics give him a high place in the history of our literature; and because his songs go straight to the heart, he is the poet of common men.

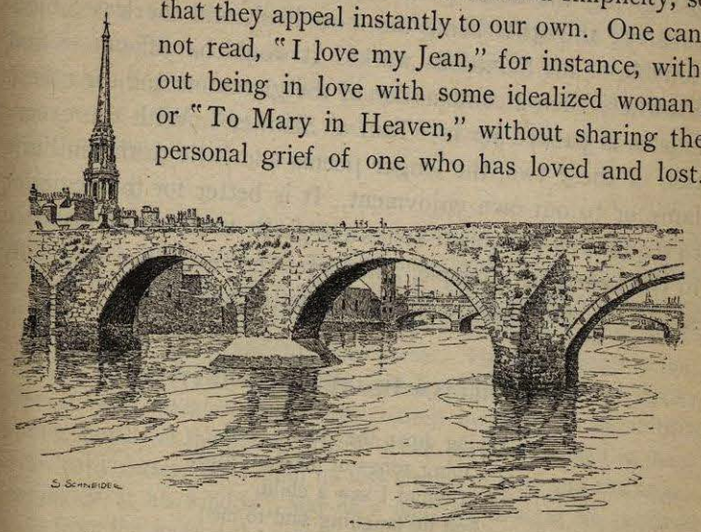
Songs for Music

Of Burns's many songs for music little need be said. They have found their way into the hearts of a whole people, and there they speak for themselves. They range from the exquisite "O wert thou in the cauld blast," to the tremendous appeal to Scottish patriotism in "Scots wha hae wi' Wallace bled," which, Carlyle said, should be sung with the throat of the whirlwind. Many of these songs were composed in his best days, when following the plow or resting after his work, while the music of some old Scotch song was ringing in his head. It is largely because he thought of music while he composed that so many of his poems have the singing quality, suggesting a melody as we read them.

Among his poems of nature, "To a Mouse" and "To a Mountain Daisy" are unquestionably the best, suggesting the poetical possibilities that daily pass unnoticed under our feet. These two poems are as near as Burns ever comes to appreciating nature for its own sake. The majority of his poems, like "Winter" and "Ye banks and braes o' bonie Doon," regard nature in the same way that Gray regarded it, as a background for the play of human emotions.

Of his poems of emotion there is an immense number. It is a curious fact that the world is always laughing and crying at the same moment; and we can hardly read a page of

Burns without finding this natural juxtaposition of smiles and tears. It is noteworthy also that all strong emotions, when expressed naturally, lend themselves to poetry; and Burns, more than any other writer, has an astonishing faculty of describing his own emotions with vividness and simplicity, so that they appeal instantly to our own. One cannot read, "I love my Jean," for instance, without being in love with some idealized woman; or "To Mary in Heaven," without sharing the personal grief of one who has loved and lost.



THE AULD BRIG, AYR (AYR BRIDGE)

Miscellaneous Poems

Besides the songs of nature and of human emotion, Burns has given us a large number of poems for which no general title can be given. Noteworthy among these are "A man's a man for a' that," which voices the new romantic estimate of humanity; "The Vision," from which we get a strong impression of Burns's early ideals; the "Epistle to a Young Friend," from which, rather than from his satires, we learn Burns's personal views of religion and honor; the "Address to the Unco Guid," which is the poet's plea for mercy in judgment; and "A Bard's Epitaph," which, as a summary of his own life, might well be written at the end of his poems. "Halloween," a picture of rustic merrymaking, and "The Twa Dogs," a contrast between the rich and poor,

are generally classed among the poet's best works; but one unfamiliar with the Scotch dialect will find them rather difficult.

Of Burns's longer poems the two best worth reading are "The Cotter's Saturday Night" and "Tam o' Shanter," — the one giving the most perfect picture we possess of a noble poverty; the other being the most lively and the least objectionable of his humorous works. It would be difficult to find elsewhere such a combination of the grewsome and the ridiculous as is packed up in "Tam o' Shanter." With the exception of these two, the longer poems add little to the author's fame or to our own enjoyment. It is better for the beginner to read Burns's exquisite songs and gladly to recognize his place in the hearts of a people, and forget the rest, since they only sadden us and obscure the poet's better nature.

William Blake (1757–1827)

Piping down the valleys wild,
  Piping songs of pleasant glee,
On a cloud I saw a child,
  And he laughing said to me:

"Pipe a song about a lamb;"
  So I piped with merry cheer.
"Piper, pipe that song again;"
  So I piped: he wept to hear.

"Piper, sit thee down and write
  In a book, that all may read;"
So he vanished from my sight,
  And I plucked a hollow reed,

And I made a rural pen,
  And I stained the water clear,
And I wrote my happy songs
  Every child may joy to hear.[1]

Of all the romantic poets of the eighteenth century, Blake is the most independent and the most original. In his earliest

[1] Introduction, *Songs of Innocence.*

work, written when he was scarcely more than a child, he seems to go back to the Elizabethan song writers for his models; but for the greater part of his life he was the poet of inspiration alone, following no man's lead, and obeying no voice but that which he heard in his own mystic soul. Though the most extraordinary literary genius of his age, he had practically no influence upon it. Indeed, we hardly yet understand this poet of pure fancy, this mystic, this transcendental madman, who remained to the end of his busy life an incomprehensible child.

Life. Blake, the son of a London tradesman, was a strange, imaginative child, whose soul was more at home with brooks and flowers and fairies than with the crowd of the city streets. Beyond learning to read and write, he received no education; but he began, at ten years, to copy prints and to write verses. He also began a long course of art study, which resulted in his publishing his own books, adorned with marginal engravings colored by hand, — an unusual setting, worthy of the strong artistic sense that shows itself in many of his early verses. As a child he had visions of God and the angels looking in at his window; and as a man he thought he received visits from the souls of the great dead, Moses, Virgil, Homer, Dante, Milton, — "majestic shadows, gray but luminous," he calls them. He seems never to have asked himself the question how far these visions were pure illusions, but believed and trusted them implicitly. To him all nature was a vast spiritual symbolism, wherein he saw elves, fairies, devils, angels, — all looking at him in friendship or enmity through the eyes of flowers and stars:

With the blue sky spread over with wings,
  And the mild sun that mounts and sings;
With trees and fields full of fairy elves,
  And little devils who fight for themselves;
With angels planted in hawthorne bowers,
  And God himself in the passing hours.

And this curious, pantheistic conception of nature was not a matter of creed, but the very essence of Blake's life. Strangely enough, he made no attempt to found a new religious cult, but followed his own