WAKEMAN'S WANDERINGS

ROBERT BURNS' FARM HOME AT ELLISLAND, SCOTLAND.

The Only Spot on All This Earth Where Comfort and Happiness Were Hinting Memories of Scotia's Immortal Bard Recalled—The Nith and Its Glorious Valley.

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ELLISLAND, Scotland, June 3.—Pilgrimmg among the countless shrines created by the living presence of Robert Burns in southwestern Scotland, and looking down along the flaming shaft of light that links his genius and his world-circling human love and magnanimity to the fadeless immortality of his memory and name, I have always felt that the one shrine this all which most breathes to the beholder the spirit of ineffable pathos and tenderness was this, the bard's farm home of Ellisland.

In the period between May, 1786, at the age of twenty-seven years, and the end of the year 1791, when he rose from this Ellisland farm to the three rooms in the "Wee Vennel," in Dumfries, a period of but four and one-half years, were poured hope and disappointment, joy and suffering, anguish from impulses wrong doing and lessons of the purest human love, temptation and victory, against despair and triumph, were crowded into the poet's experience, then full to the lot of more great men in their entire lives. In this brief time, first he was crossed and thwarted by Jean Armour, through the bitter and ever unreasoning opposition of her father. He was crossed by the "Highland Mary" Campbell, the heroine of his immortal ode, "Ye Mary in Heaven," who shortly died of malignant fever at Greenock.

Almost 100 of his most characteristic poems were already written, and the new performer here edition of the same had been issued from the royal press of Kilmarnock, in the county of Dumfries. Two children had been born to him out of wedlock by Jean Armour, of whom Burns, in after years at sight of their character and worth, survived the poet fifty-eight years, his descendants remaining at Dumfries in 1891, and his body being interred in the Burns mausoleum in that city. Burns' fond fame having attracted the attention of the literary critics at Edinburgh, he was invited to their city, where he was "affiliated" at the famous house of Provanmire (which still meets in the "Masonic Lodge") and subsequently "inaugurated" as the poet laureate, the latter event being the subject of a celebrated painting, while he was made the Lion of the day, and saw and enjoyed editions of his poems approved.

He then made a tour of the border counties of England and Scotland, and, encouraged by fame, returned to Mauchline, the old home not in Ayr, drawn there by his fond love for his Jean, who repented her estimation, and with whom the former intimacy was renewed. The tour of the north was then made. Burns returned to greater Edinburgh literary triumphs. He was introduced to Mrs. Maclehose, the "Clarinda" of his famous correspondence, and again returning to his beloved Jean, took her secretly to Turbulion Mill, where twins, both of which died, were again born to them. Being now independent of scandalous opposition, Burns publicly and properly "acknowledged" Jean Armour as his wife, then in secret and binding a marriage in Scotland as any other, and in this instance necessary only because delayed formal marriage by the wife's parents, who then were solely responsible for the delay upon the poet's marital record. Burns also "satisfied" the church, which unknown to was not so very difficult of "satisfaction." He was then in a position to "satisfy" Jean's parents, for an settlement with Creech, his Edinburgh publisher, the then astounding sum of $1,500 was found to be at his disposal.

Then came the brief, bright days. Magnanimously generous always, much of this sum, the first and last good fortune Burns ever knew, was given to Jean's parents, and to assist his brother, Gilbert Burns, in securing tenancy in the latter's farm life affairs. His lucky meeting with the Ingrahams and kindly friends of the Dumfries kind, had occurred. It had been settled that the poet, who hated the city with a royal hatred, should return to the place. The poet's wife, who was ever quite forgave the pleasure singing and love, demonstrated the greatest inspiration. This beautiful farm of Ellisland, five miles above Dumfries, was taken at a rental of fifty pounds per year. Burns, married, began his farm between the first Monday after Whitsunday, 1788. He hated monthly until the autumn, 1789, when he rose from this farm to the "wee house" in the town, and sang more a lusty song to his absent wife, and built the lovely message which stands here enhancered to rose to this day. And then was celebrated the poem that glorious home coming, when, with rustic rime, and his honey Jean upon his arm, "crooded by a peasant girl carrying the family Bible and a bowl of ale," he marched proudly into his little home known beside the winding Nith.

All evidences agree that in the brief period of a little over two years, between Whitsunday, 1788, and Martinmas, 1791, Burns and his good Jean experienced an Eden of labor and love, with the inevitable serpent departure. It was also the period of Burns' best and greatest poetic fecundity. But misfortunes came to them. There must be temporal. Burns failed, and inevitable ruin was approaching. It was then that, to save his wife and children from actual want, he was forced to accept the government offer of an excise man, at the legacy pleasure of the per year. The five remaining years of his life—after the poet, his Jean and their three children, Robert, Francis Wallace and William Nicol, removed to the humble lodgings, their first home in Dumfries—checkered, sad, pathetic, begun somewhere, we know not when.

Leaving the opulent old city of Dumfries, you cross the "new brig" to the west, and stop at once in the pretty seaside hamlet of Maxwelltown, famous whether lovers' songs are sung, or the fact that one incomparably sober ballad, equal to any that Burns himself gave the world, matchless "Annie Laurie." Then the highway—the stage coach road between Dumfries and Glasgow—winds over hear and hill, through dale and dingle, over rock and burn, through shadowy avenues and pouches of exuberant dogwood and hawthorn, and now alone where past deserted cots, and now alone where ages of toil with the songs of reapers and binders ever in your ears, at the distance to Ellisland. Close upon the outspring habitations of Maxwelltown you will see down there to the right the picturesque ruins of Lochaber abbey, but a few hundred yards' walk from the highway. Beneath the shadows of its ancient walls lie Margaret, daughter of Robert III, king of Scotland.

If you will wander for a little distance on that field leading to the left you will come to the ancient church of Dunscore. There is the grave of Sir Walter Scott's "Jessie Dean" (Helen Walker), and the inscription on the pale lamentation was written by the father of Walter Scott himself. This pilgrimage of bridge to wheel you carry—for there is a pretty scene of ships working going on beneath the point where the road crosses the river Cluden, willows just above—cross the river Cluden, a small stream, but a fateful one, in floods, a small stream, but a fateful one, in floods, and ascend a little more, emerge around the ancient abbey walls, and, entering the Nith, broaden into a deep pool or lake. Behind this Cluden, "the Clyden pool," and the name of the grand old seat of Lochaber pile, Lincluden Abbey, which towers at its back above.

You finally come to a bit of stone shanghaied country. Comfortable farmhouses with snug stone cottages in an elegant style of the highway. To the right is an old farm road opening to a long lane, hedge bordered, between well kept fields, where the young grain is already dark and green. The wagonwa is thick with the fragrance of the hawthorn. The hedge banks are a mass of elaborate daisies. A tiny brier, having its course in springs above, wimples as one side, half hidden in the grass and daisies. And at the end of this lane, just over a ridge of water and rushy bank, we see the low roofs of a cottage and its kitchen outbuildings, here and there half hidden in the foliage of surrounding trees. This is Ellisland, for four years the farm home and home dwelling of Robert Burns, the only spot on all this earth where comfort and happiness were his.

From the highway Ellisland is disappointing. The edge of the sounding Nith forms a sometimes bare and rocky line. Burns knew where to build his Nithdale home. From any point in the vicinity or upon any farm buildings there is a glorious view of the valley of the Nith. The home faces to the east and north a gentle bend in the Nith, which sometimes forever the shining shallows not a hundred yards distant, with the outbuildings and their connecting rubble walls a sunny, nearly inclosed quadrangle in front. The land sweeps from the road highway to the west for to the right, so you enter the farm yard a cattle and cowhouse, and a barn as fine and strong and even roofed. To the left is a hill, which, a mere elevation, a tiny barn, and behind the latter twelve, with the stable and outhouse, stand precisely as Burns built them! In the thickset rock fence which bounds the farm yard to the south and east, the poet's hand in that great agony of depression which gave the world the matchless hymn to Mary in heaven.

The house itself, into the construction of which the poet put months of his own labor, working alongside the rustic masons of the time, remains to this day exactly as he built it. A small kitchen has been added on the side near the river, which now, as then, is the front of the house. The portion built by Burns is of rubble, about 30 feet long and nearly 20 in width. It is one story in height, with an angle attic. There is a large room about 18 feet square on each end. The entrance from the Nithside was into a hallway, from which there two large rooms were reached. One of this one could also pass for the other alcove, and to a small kitchen, with a little bedroom, which made rooms the two larger rooms. Of the latter, the one at the left or north end, which commodious with the little bedroom, was used by Burns for the occasional entertainment of distinguished guests.

The cities, at the south end, was the real heart of the home—the "spence" or living room of the poet, his wife and bairns. The family provisions were kept here. In one end stood the bed. The meals were eaten here. And here the companions that Burns loved came into the light-hearted glee. Beside the fireplace is a broad, low window. Against the sills will stand an oaken table, and here the poet in his cozy armed ease could look out upon the flowers and vines of his own little garden, let them dwell lovely upon his exile and yet sheep in the silvery field beyond, or conjure glorious images from the noble sweep of Nithsdale's broad southern expanse, crowded in its eastern edge with table forest and the huge golden of Dunscribbon hall. By this little window Burns wrote, composed or put into completed manuscript form the greatest account of the greatest work of his life. How we prize the least scrawl of those royal fellows when they are gone!

There are those who would pay $1,000 each for two of his tiny pieces in that one room. One was thrown down with a diamond and afterward partially erased, "Home be but mine—home is the resort," on the other he inscribed his favorite motto, "A honest man's the noblest work of God." These inscriptions, the house and outbuildings and a few steady trees hanging