

**BURNS AND
TARBOLTON**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649765003

Burns and Tarbolton by E. H. Letham (Robert Stuart)

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

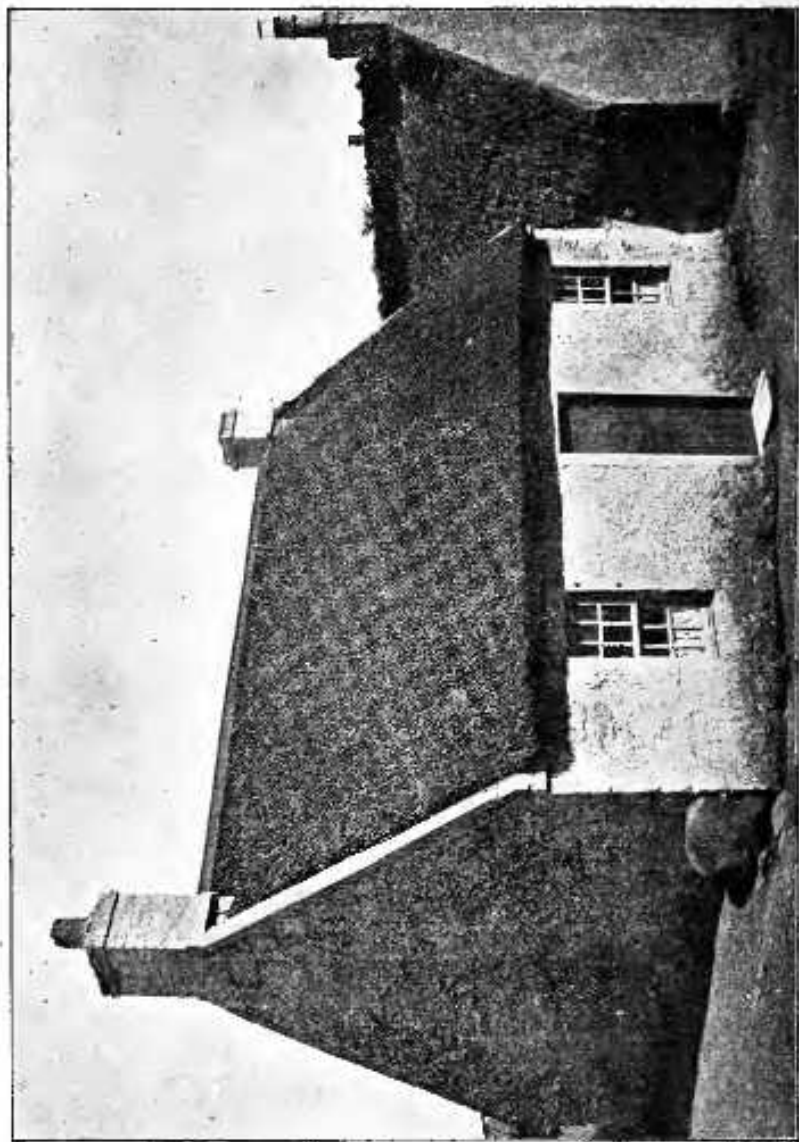
Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

E. H. LETHAM (ROBERT STEUART)

**BURNS AND
TARBOLTON**



THE HOUSE, AT TARBOLTON, WHERE BURNS WAS MADE A MASON.

David Hutchison.

BURNS AND TARBOLTON.

• • •

BY

E. H. LETHAM,

(ROBERT STUART,)

AUTHOR OF "LEGENDS FROM THE LOTHIANS."

• • •

KILMARNOCK: D. BROWN & Co.

GLASGOW: J. MENZIES & Co.

1900.

TO THE BURNS CLUBS
OF THE WORLD,

THIS VOLUME IS DEDICATED

WITH

THE AUTHOR'S HEARTY GOODWILL.

CONTENTS.

| | PAGE. |
|---|-------|
| FRONTISPIECE - - - - - | - |
| DEDICATION, - - - - - | - |
| THE NUCLEUS OF THE PARISH, - - - - - | 1 |
| THE VILLAGE, - - - - - | 21 |
| BURNS AND TARBOLTON, - - - - - | 47 |
| AROUND THE CASTLE O' MONTGOMERIE, - - - - - | 90 |
| WITCHCRAFT IN KYLE, - - - - - | 102 |
| BURNS AS BLACKFOOT, - - - - - | 113 |
| EPILOGUE, - - - - - | 125 |
| APPENDIX, - - - - - | 129 |

THE NUCLEUS OF THE PARISH.

THE men of Stewart Kyle are loyal and patriotic, and, at their social gatherings, respond cordially to the usual sentiments, but their enthusiasm, the kindling eye and flushing cheek, and grip of hand to hand, is reserved for the toast of the evening—Burns and Tarbolton.

And, indeed, the two are indissolubly connected, for the man cannot be separated from his surroundings, although he is mostly represented by himself alone, and without that local colouring, which might at once explain and excuse his actions. In this district his life's education may be said to have commenced; for what he afterwards developed, it must partly be responsible, so, if the schools in which the immortals are trained be deserving of notice, then surely this college of Tarbolton, through which Burns graduated into manhood, has especial claims to consideration. It is a place of great antiquity, and interesting for its own sake in many ways, and, while its manners and customs are worth studying, as part of our national social life—its connection with our national poet makes them still more so.

The nucleus of the parish and clachan is undoubtedly that Hill of Baal's Fire, after which they are designated. The name is of Celtic derivation: Tor, as it once was, and

still ought to be spelled, a round hill; Bal, or Bel, or Baal, the sun god of the Phœnicians; and *Teixe* or fire, corrupted into Ton. Like various other places in our country, it has preserved indications of pre-historic religions, which are tantalising to the antiquary, from the absence of any data or details, with the exception of the accounts of Druidism transmitted by the Roman historians, to fix the periods at which they predominated. Most probably the different forms of Paganism merged gradually one into the other, and in turn were slowly absorbed into Christianity. It is strange to find, after the lapse of so many centuries, that traces of these old religions still remain in the land, in spite of the vigorous efforts that were made to obliterate them. In early ages, the Church temporised by trying, as far as possible, to leaven the Pagan ceremonies with associations of the new faith, and in some districts even gave to the Baal fires, which it could not prevent, the names of the Evangelists, or of saints. Something analogous appears to have been done in regard to the holy wells, which are generally associated with the Roman Catholic mode of worship, but in reality seem to have been assimilated by the early Church from the older faith, for Adamnan relates that when Columba was staying in the province of the Picts, he heard of a fountain famous among the heathen people, and which they worshipped as God. The specified acts of worship were that they drank of it, and afterwards washed their hands and feet, thus expecting to be cured of their diseases. Columba saw his opportunity, immediately blessed the spring, drank of it, washed himself, and from that time his followers claimed for Christianity the merits of its healing powers. Long afterwards, when the reformed faith began to spread,

more decided measures were deemed necessary, and the Lollards of Kyle protested vigorously, in their own district, against the Baal fires, which even then blazed, on the first of May, from every hill-top in Scotland; while from the days of Knox onwards, the General Assemblies did their best to suppress the usages still in existence, although their origin and significance had ceased to be remembered. Yet they might have spared their trouble, for, though there is little fear of a national revival of Paganism, while our language lasts its memory will not be forgotten, and, as we shall show, more of its rites were preserved than what was implied by the figure-heads on our ships, or the libations to the sea-god which took place at their launching. Beltan was long the appellation of the removal term in Ayrshire, and to the present day, in some parts of the county, any conflagration is spoken of as a "bale fire." Clachan, itself, means "the stones," in allusion to the Druidic circles and stone altars no doubt, and probably the habit of building their homes under the shadow of these holy places would have an early origin, while it used to be customary for old people in the Highlands of Scotland to speak of going to church as "going to the stones." In an old translation of the Scriptures the wise men from the East figure as "Druids." Sir Walter Scott was for a time greatly puzzled over the derivation of a place-name in his neighbourhood. He had reasons for supposing that "Hexel Cleuch" had some association with Druidism, but failed to catch the connecting link. It did not seem to possess any meaning in the Scottish language, while it was extremely suggestive of the German "Hexa," a witch; but he could scarcely put faith in an allusion so far fetched, which was yet no explanation. At