

ROBERT BURNS

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Robert Burns by Sir George Douglas

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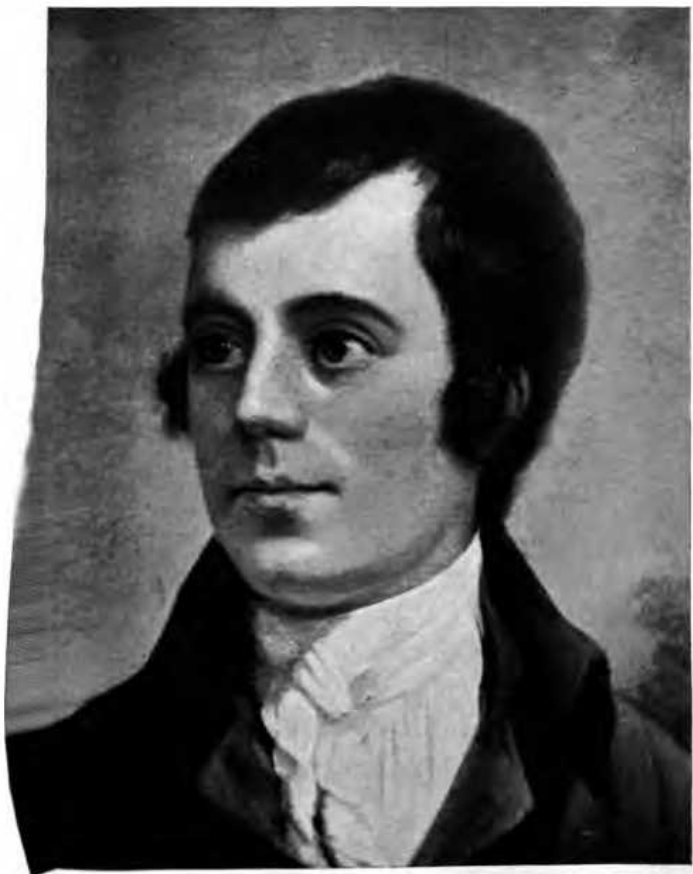
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SIR GEORGE DOUGLAS

ROBERT BURNS



ROBERT BURNS

*From the painting by
Alexander Nasmyth*

ROBERT BURNS

BY

SIR GEORGE DOUGLAS, BART.

AND

W. S. CROCKETT

WITH NUMEROUS ILLUSTRATIONS

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
ROBERT BURNS (from a painting by Alexander Nasmyth) . . .	<i>Frontispiece</i>
THE BIRTHPLACE OF ROBERT BURNS (from a painting by Sam Bough, R.S.A.)	1
BURNS'S COTTAGE, ALLOWAY	2
INTERIOR OF BURNS'S COTTAGE	2
THE MOTHER OF ROBERT BURNS	3
ROBERT BURNS (from the full-length painting by Alexander Nasmyth)	4
ROBERT BURNS (from a portrait by an unknown artist)	5
AULD ALLOWAY KIRK	6
THE AULD BRIG O' DOON	7
ROBERT BURNS, 1786 (from the painting by Peter Taylor)	8
ROBERT BURNS (from an original painting by Alexander Nasmyth)	9
MOUNT OLIPHANT	10
LOCHLEA	10
ROBERT BURNS (from a drawing by E. J. Sullivan)	11
WILLIE'S MILL, TARBOLTON	12
TARBOLTON	12
THE CASTLE OF MONTGOMERY	13
THE OLD MASONIC LODGE, TARBOLTON	13
THE INAUGURATION OF ROBERT BURNS AS POET LAUREATE OF THE LODGE CANONGATE KILWINNING, No. 2, EDINBURGH, 1787	15
ON THE RIVER AYR, AT BARKSKIMMING	17
THE "HECKLING" HOUSE, IRVINE	17
JEAN ARMOUR	18

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
MOSSGIEL	19
THE HOUSE OF GAVIN HAMILTON ADJOINING "MAUCHLINE CASTLE"	19
CLARINDA	20
ROBERT BURNS, 1787 (from a silhouette by J. Miers)	20
ROBERT BURNS, 1796 (from a miniature by Alexander Reid)	21
ROBERT BURNS (from a silhouette)	21
THE BRIGS OF AYR	22
THE RIVER AYR, NEAR MONTGOMERY CASTLE	22
BONIE JEAN AND GRANDCHILD (Mrs. Hutchinson in childhood)	23
THE COWGATE, MAUCHLINE	24
POOSIE NANSIE'S HOSTEL	25
A PORTION OF THE MS. OF ROBERT BURNS REPRODUCED FROM "TAM O' SHANTER"	26
MRS. FRANCES ANNA DUNLOP	27
THE MEETING OF BURNS AND SCOTT	29
ELLISLAND	30
COLZEAN CASTLE, WITH THE FAIRY COVES	30
THE FUNERAL OF ROBERT BURNS	31
BALLOCHMYLE HOUSE	31
THE HOUSE IN DUMFRIES IN WHICH BURNS DIED	32
THE BURNS MONUMENT, ALLOWAY	32
THE STATUE OF ROBERT BURNS IN THE SCOTTISH NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY	33
THE STATUE OF ROBERT BURNS AT DUMFRIES	34
THE STATUE OF ROBERT BURNS AT IRVINE	34
THE MAUSOLEUM OF ROBERT BURNS AT DUMFRIES	35
INTERIOR OF THE MAUSOLEUM AT DUMFRIES	35

ROBERT BURNS



From a painting by Sam Bough, R.S.A.

THE BIRTHPLACE OF ROBERT BURNS

(Reproduced by kind permission of Mr. James Thin)

IT may be safely predicated that, of all great poets, ancient or modern, native or foreign, Burns is he of whom it is most difficult to speak with freshness. For this, I fear, the Burns clubs are mainly answerable. In 1802, when the first of these—that of Greenock — was founded, the poet had

been dead but six years; and, since that date, the recurrence of January 25th has seen, year by year, poured forth an ever-increasing volume of rhetorical appreciation of the poet and his work. Now, in a country where oratory is a deliberately neglected art—in whose National Assembly an Edmund Burke would no longer find a hearing, whilst among Burke's successors the slightest attempt at eloquence is almost invariably received with jeers,—in such a country, it were matter of marvel if the average of excellence attained by the Burns eulogist were a high one. The result, then, I fear, is that the theme is not so much illuminated as rendered trite: there is much truth in De Stendhal's maxim that, in art, all work which



Photo by G. W. Wilson & Co., Aberdeen
BURN'S COTTAGE, ALLOWAY

race is one of perpetual change, and that year by year the subject of our study presents itself in a fresh aspect.

The outstanding characteristic of Burns is this: that, of all great poets, he most completely reveals his own personality, and hence comes nearest to his reader. The assertion is a sweeping one; let me endeavour to give it some substantiation. If we would seek



From a painting by W. Bell Scott, H.R.S.A.

INTERIOR OF BURN'S COTTAGE

Reproduced from the illustrated catalogue of the Burns Exhibition, Glasgow, 1896, by kind permission of Messrs. T. R. Annan & Sons)

is not first-rate is injurious to our feeling for the beautiful. On this account, it specially behoves that we lose not sight of the fact that that theme is in its nature as inexhaustible as humanity, that the attitude towards it of a growing and developing

for self-revelation, then, for a close relation between poet and audience, it is obviously to the lyric, rather than to the epic or dramatic poets, that we must turn—to those poets, that is, whose utterance is most frequently personal, whose subject-matter is their own experience and emo-

tion rather than so many imaginary experiences of so many imaginary persons.

Among lyric poets, however, Pindar, perhaps the greatest of them all, is in one sense exceptional. For Pindar has generally a story to tell; he is occupied, not with deeds or feelings of his own, but

THE MOTHER
OF
ROBERT BURNS

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illustrated catalogue
of the
Burns Exhibition, Glasgow,
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with deeds or feelings of divine and heroic figures who people the golden ether of his song. His utterance, where it is personal, is also parenthetical. Then, the path of his lay is the path also of the lightning; the vehement rush of his inspiration traverses a region far beyond the ken of ordinary men. Nothing could well be less like