

**A LECTURE ON THE  
PRIVATE AND LITERARY  
LIFE OF BURNS**

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A Lecture on the Private and Literary Life of Burns by A. M. Walker

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A LECTURE  
ON THE  
PRIVATE AND LITERARY  
LIFE OF BURNS;

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USEFUL KNOWLEDGE INSTITUTION.

BY  
A. M. WALKER, M.A., M.D.

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## P R E F A C E .

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AS HONORARY SECRETARY to the Useful Knowledge Institution, I am naturally interested in its welfare and prosperity, and finding that no new Books have been added to the Library during the last five years, I publish this little work, in the hope that it may be instrumental in raising funds for the purchase of some of the best standard authors,—in which the Library is very deficient.

I, therefore, trust that the members,—the Gentry and Tradesmen of the Town, who are interested in the success of the Institution, will unite with me in promoting the sale of

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the edition ;—especially as its proceeds are to be handed over to the Treasurer, for the purpose I have mentioned.

This Lecture was delivered, by request, some years ago, before some of the Metropolitan Literary and Scientific Institutions.

SUSSEX HOUSE, PARADE,  
TUNBRIDGE WELLS.



ROBERT BURNS is now, with most of us, a household word,—a word which we can never utter without recalling the best affections. It is sounded around hearths innumerable, and with immortal song it is consecrated in all that is most genial, most loving, and most loveable in our intercourse; in the freshness and fun of our laughing nature, and the sadness and sorrows of more thoughtful hours. It is unnecessary to dwell long on a life so well known, but the order of my subject requires that I should not entirely pass it over. If it be not new, it has at least an interest in the memories which can bear repetition.

He was, as most of you know, the son of a Scottish peasant, and born in 1759, in a cottage on the banks of the Doon. His father was no common man, and, if a peasant, he was of that order of peasant which makes his country's pride. According to his son, and all his son's biographers, he was a man of original and

vigorous mind, of extensive and useful information, of moveless integrity, of earnest and deep piety, and of solemn, even, austere manners. His mother is described as having all the softness and purity of her sex, mild, affectionate, and benignant. She loved her son, her home, her family, and her country; and she sung by her fire-side the olden ballads of her poetic and native soil, as well as became a matron of the land of "the Wallace and the Bruce." Robert seems a noble compound of both his parents,—the fine and manly clay of his father, attempered with the dewy tenderness of his mother,—the whole fraught with that Promethean fire, throbbing in his powerful and passionate soul, which *Coila*, the muse of his country, breathed into him when she kissed him in his infant cradle, and anointed him the immortal bard of her own loved Scotland.

Considering his circumstances, his education was, on the whole, a good one, and in reference to his poetic destiny, it may be well doubted whether it could be better. No college, it is true, could claim him as her son, but he was not on that account without an education. He

knew not, to read a Latin oration, nor to scan a Greek verse ; but he knew what was more to his purpose—to read the heart of man, and the works of God. We are not, however, of those, nor was he, who consider all things within the power of wild and untutored genius. Genius itself must be trained and elaborated into adequate expression, yet in a way suitable to its peculiar tendencies. Burns knew this with the strong wisdom which belongs to great minds, and he acted on this knowledge. He cultivated his intellect to the full extent of his opportunities ; he neglected no means of instruction, and he despised no useful acquirement. He had none of that indolent vanity which delays preparation to the last, and then trusts all to sudden excitement and undigested emotions. He looked to the ideal, as every man of genius does, and he was aware that this was not to be discovered in a passing glance, or to be reached in a single bound : he knew that in the effort to unfold it, no execution could be too careful, and no labor too great ; and he felt, that justice to himself, and respect to his art, demanded an honest and earnest devotion of his powers.