

**ROBERT BURNS' COMMON  
PLACE BOOK;  
PRINTED FROM THE  
ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPT**

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Robert Burns' common place book; printed from the original manuscript by John Adam

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**JOHN ADAM**

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ROBERT BURNS'  
COMMON PLACE BOOK.

*Printed from the Original Manuscript*

IN THE POSSESSION OF JOHN ADAM, ESQ.,  
GREENOCK.



EDINBURGH.

Privately Printed.

1872.

*Arch. Bodd. P.*  
*III. 52.*

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## PREFACE.

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THE *Original Manuscript Commonplace-Book* of ROBERT BURNS, is here given to the public in its entire and primitive shape for the first time. Only *now* can it be said, the *Book* is given as Burns wrote it, *from day to day*, in those, his early days, when, as yet, the world had never heard of him. Editions of "BURNS" are as the sands of the sea for multitude; many of great excellence, stored with fresh and original matter, contain notices of the *Commonplace-Book* and versions, more or less connected, of portions of its contents, yet, strange to say, no ONE edition has it, in its first shape, in its original connection, and in its full extent. These extracts, merely copied by one Editor from another, can here at *last* be referred to the *original* of all the copies: and it will be abundantly plain that no one of the Editors, from Currie, down to the latest, had access to the *genuine original Manuscript*.

Burns evidently sent an *amended* and interpolated copy of the MS. to *Captain Riddel* (to whom he addressed the "Observations on Scottish Song") prefaced with the following:—

“On rummaging over some old papers I lighted on a MS. of my early years, in which I had determined to write myself out; as I was placed by fortune among a class of men to whom my ideas would have been nonsense, I had meant that the book should have lain by me, in the fond hope, that some time or other, even after I was no more, my thoughts would fall into the hands of somebody capable of appreciating their value.” And this is the source of all the versions, copied by each successive editor, carefully adhered to by all, the touched “*Replica*,” NOT the original picture, as can be seen on collation of the already printed portions, with any page of this reproduction of the original. In a London dealer’s catalogue, a few years ago, appeared the sale notice among some Burnsiana, of “*Burns’ Commonplace-Book begun in April 1783.—Observations, Hints, Songs, Scraps of Poetry, by Robert Burness, a man who had little art in making money and still less in keeping it.*” Among the Contents, are cited—“*O once I loved a bonnie lass*”—“*Criticism*,”—“*Remorse*,”—“*Penitential Thought*,”—“*Observations on the Vice of Human Nature*,”—“*O thou great Being*,”—“*The Wintry West*,”—“*My Father was a Farmer*,”—Observations on writing Love verses,—“*Behind yon hills where Stincher flows.*” *Epitaphs* (two unprinted),—“*Observations on the species of men.*”—(the original sketch of) “*Green grows the rasbes, O*,”—“*Prayer*,”—“*Despondency*,”—“*Tibby I hae seen the day*,”—(early song not printed) “*My girl is airy, she’s buxom*



and gay,"—"John Barley Corn, a song to its own tune," (curious note),—"1st Epistle to Lapraik," with the date 1st April, 1785, (superior readings to Currie's),—"On receiving an answer to the above I wrote the following, April 21st, 1785;" then follows the 2d Epistle, "Man was made to mourn," reflections on his fate,—"When first I came to Stewart Kyle," fragment not printed, and "Now breezy Win's and slaughtering Guns," the four last lines of which are

Now waving crops, with yellow tops,  
 Delight the weary Farmer,  
 An' the moon shines bright when I rove at night  
 To muse on *Jeanie Armour*.

*The name in the last line expressed in short hand.* Notes on old Scots Songs, &c. The MS. now published: found to be as described, and in the most perfect condition: 11 sheets, 16 ins. by 12½, broached with a coarse thread, the outward figure of the book so rude and common, that, on looking at it, one feels an overwhelming conviction that it is *now* in the form, with the leaves in the precise position they occupied when Burns bought the blank paper and had it stitched for him, most likely, in "wee Jonnie Wilson's Shop," in Kilmarnock. The watermarks on the paper—right, a group of figures, motto, *Pro Patria*; left, circular, doubled intertwined cyphers *E.B.*, give the curious a clue to date and maker. Page 1, elaborately careful, evidently Burns' handwriting,

but of juvenile cast, with its double motto from Shenstone, was plainly written long before any of the "*Observations*" had connected existence, at least on paper. Page 2, blank. Pp. 3 to 42, written on both sides of the sheets with *paging*, "*catchwords*," and marginal dates, all in Burns' handwriting. P. 43, (unpaged) about one-third occupied by *writing*. Page 44, entirely blank. The writing is bold, clear, perfectly decipherable in every part, full of spirit and character, the letter forms peculiar and striking, seem to grow in size with the intensity of the sentiment, in such phrases as the "*Lash of Remorse*" assume weird and gigantic forms bodying forth to the eye the horrors of the mind, as if that lash had not simply *nine* but 999 tails; but then "*My Nannie, O*," is registered in letters as big, and the often named master-passion always appears recorded in letters of a size suiting its high position and estimation in the Poet's breast. The corrections, substitutions, interlineations, and variations are most curious and deeply interesting throughout: on page 3d, at line 6th, some daring hand has ventured a correction, and deleting *one* word of Burns', has inserted *three* of somebody else's, converting the phrase "*Green Eighteen*" into "*a Youth of Eighteen*." This is a solitary instance, there is scarcely a blot, and not *one erasure* from end to end of the MS. Beginning with the date, April 1783, and ending with October 1785—here appear in their first, unvarnished shape, long before they were prepared for the public eye, the two Epistles

to "*Lapraik*,"—" *Man was made to mourn*,"—" *Green grows the Rasbes, O*,"—" *John Barleycorn*,"—" *Death and dying words of poor Maillie*," and many other less important pieces. At the date "*April '83*," we notice the germ of a beautiful stanza of the "*Cottar's Saturday Night*," the variants of omission, insertion, and alteration from the printed copies, give us a glance into the Poet's workshop, enabling us to judge of the value of his *revise*, and of the quality of his work, by the first state of his thoughts, in the rough.

The reproduction of the Original has been made with the most scrupulous adherence to the exact form in which it exists, in the most minute particulars, the orthography has been preserved in every instance, the punctuation retained, wherever any indication of it existed, no single word has been added, no one altered, or omitted and with the most perfect truth, it may be said that *this*, the most interesting record of the first phase of the literary career of Burns, is given absolutely as he left it. Here it is that Burns' genius receives its first illustration, the dawnings of the day of Song here first struggle above the horizon, the first uncertain pipings of his muse find a bashful utterance, and all as yet unknown, uncared for, by the circle of his neighbours and fellow-rustics, as by the greater world outside, he rules his little inner realm of thought and fancy; deals praise and blame, now pauses over some pleasant or painful fancy, and now blazes forth in all the fire and vigour of the creative Poet's highest