

CCV.—TO MR. JAMES BURNES, WRITER, MONTROSE.

DUMFRIES, 12th July.

MY DEAR COUSIN,—When you offered me money assistance, little did I think I should want it so soon. A rascal of a haberdasher, to whom I owe a considerable bill, taking it into his head that I am dying, has commenced a process against me, and will infallibly put my emaciated body into jail. Will you be so good as to accommodate me, and that by return of post, with ten pounds? O James, did you know the pride of my heart, you would feel doubly for me! Alas! I am not used to beg! The worst of it is, my health was coming about finely. Melancholy and low spirits are half my disease. If I had it settled, I would be, I think, quite well in a manner. R. B.

CCVI.—TO HIS FATHER-IN-LAW, JAMES ARMOUR,
MASON,* MAUCHLINE.

DUMFRIES, 18th July 1799. 6

MY DEAR SIR,—Do, for heaven's sake, send Mrs. Armour here immediately. My wife is hourly expecting to be put to bed. Good God! what a situation for her to be in, poor girl, without a friend! I returned from sea-bathing quarters to-day, and my medical friends would almost persuade me that I am better, but I think and feel that my strength is so gone that the disorder will prove fatal to me.—Your son-in-law, R. B.

* Mrs. Burns's father. This is the very last of Burns's compositions, being written only three days before his death.

answer the purpose, and I beg you will prosecute the miscreants* without mercy. When your publication is finished, I intend publishing a collection, on a cheap plan, of all the songs I have written for you, *The Museum*, and others—at least, all the songs of which I wish to be called the author. I do not propose this so much in the way of emolument as to do justice to my muse, lest I should be blamed for trash I never saw, or be defrauded by false claimants of what is justly my own. The post is going.—I will write you again to-morrow. Many thanks for the beautiful seal.

R. B.

XXVII.

BROW-ON-SOLWAY, 4th July 1796.

MY DEAR SIR,—I received your songs; but my health is so precarious, nay, dangerously situated, that, as a last effort, I am here at sea-bathing quarters. Besides an inveterate rheumatism, my appetite is quite gone, and I am so emaciated as to be scarce able to support myself on my own legs. Alas! Is this a time for me to woo the muses? However, I am still anxiously willing to serve your work, and if possible shall try. I would not like to see another employed—unless you could lay your hand upon a poet whose productions would be equal to the rest. Farewell, and God bless you.

R. BURNS.

XXVIII.

BROW, on the Solway Firth, 12th July 1796.

AFTER all my boasted independence, curst necessity compels me to implore you for five pounds. A cruel wretch of a haberdasher, to whom I owe an account, taking it into his head that I am dying, has commenced a process, and will infallibly put me into jail.

* For infringement of copyright.

Do, for God's sake, send me that sum, and that by return of post. Forgive me this earnestness, but the horrors of a jail have made me half distracted. I do not ask all this gratuitously; for, upon returning health, I hereby promise and engage to furnish you with five pounds worth of the neatest song-genius you have seen. I tried my hand on "Rothiemurchie" this morning. The measure is so difficult that it is impossible to infuse much genius into the lines; they are on the other side. Forgive, forgive me!

Fairest maid on Devon banks,
 Crystal Devon, winding Devon,
 Wilt thou lay that frown aside,
 And smile as thou wert wont to do? (etc.)*

* These verses, and the letter inclosing them, are written in a character that marks the very feeble state of their author.