

## 1<sup>st</sup> November 1789 letter from Burns to Robert Ainslie

Ellisland 1<sup>st</sup> November 1789

My dear Friend

I had written you long ere now could I have guessed where to find you; ~~but~~ for I am sure you have more good sense than to waste the precious days of vacation time in the dirt of Business & Edin.<sup>r</sup> - Wherever you are, God bless you, & lead you not into temptation but deliver you from evil!

I do not know if I have informed you that I am now appointed to an Excise Division in the middle of which my house & farm lie. - In this I was extremely lucky - Without ever having been an Expectant, as they call their Journeymen Excisemen, I was directly planted down to all intents & purposes an Officer of Excise, there to flourish & bring forth fruits - worthy of repentance. - I know how the word, Exciseman, or still more opprobrious, Gauger, will sound in your ears. - I too have seen the day when my auditory nerves would have felt very delicately on this subject, but a wife & children are things which have a wonderful power in blunting these kind of sensations. - Fifty pounds a year for life, & a provision for widows & orphans, you will allow, is no bad settlement for a Poet. - For the ignominy of the Profession, I have the encouragement which I once heard a recruiting Sergeant give to a numerous if not a respectable audience in the Streets of Kilmarnock - "Gentlemen, for "your further & better encouragement, I can assure you that "our regiment is the most blackguard corps under the crown, "and consequently with us an honest fellow has the surest "chance for preferment."

You need not doubt I find several very unpleasant and disagreeable circumstances in my business; but I am tired with and disgusted at the language of complaint against the evils of life. - Human existence in the most favourable situations does not bound with pleasures, and had its inconveniences and ills; capricious, foolish Man mistakes these inconveniences & ills as if they were the peculiar property of his particular situation; and hence that eternal fickleness ~~and~~ that love of change which has ruined & daily does ruin many a fine fellow as well as many a Blockhead; and is almost without exception a constant source of disappointment & misery. -

So far from being dissatisfied with my present lot, I earnestly pray the Great Disposer of Events that it may never be worse and I think I can lay my hand on my heart and say "I shall be content".

This letter was to Mr. R. Ainslie

Writer to the Signet

Transcribed from MS at Robert Burns Birthplace Museum