

## 31<sup>st</sup> July 1789 draft letter Burns to Graham of Fintry

Ellisland 31<sup>st</sup> July - 1789

Sir,

The language of Gratitude has been so prostituted by servile adulation and designing flattery, that I know not how to express myself when I would acknowledge the receipt of your <sup>^last</sup> letter ~~of the 19<sup>th</sup> Inst-~~ I beg and hope, ever honoured "Friend of my life! True Patron of my rhymes" that you will always give me credit for the sincerest, chastest gratitude!

The callous Hypocrite may be louder than I, in his grateful professions which he never felt; or the selfish heart of the Covetous may pocket the bounties of Beneficence with more rejoicing exultation, but for the brimful eye springing from the ardent throbbings of an honest bosom, at the goodness of a kindly active Benefactor and Politely generous Friend, I dare call the Searcher of Hearts & Author of all goodness to witness, how truly these are mine to you.

M.<sup>r</sup> Mitchel did not wait my calling on him, but sent me a kind letter giving me a hint of the business, and on my waiting on him yesterday, he entered with the most friendly ardour into my views and interests. He seems to think, and from my own private knowledge I am certain he is right, that removing the ~~present~~ Officer who now does and for these many years has done duty in the Division in the middle of which I live will be ~~attended~~ productive of at least no disadvantage to the Revenue, and may likewise be done without any detriment to him. - Should the Honorable Board think so, and should they deem it eligible to appoint me to officiate in his present place, I am then at the top of my wishes. - The emoluments of my Office will enable <sup>^me</sup> to carry on and enjoy those improvements in my farm, which, but for this additional assistance, I must in a year or two have abandoned. Should it be judged improper to place me in this Division, I am deliberating whether I had not better give up farming altogether, and go into the Excise wherever I can find employment. Now that the Salary is £50 per anm. the Excise is surely a much superior object to a farm which, without some foreign assistance, must for half a lease be a losing bargain. - The worst of it is, I know that there are some respectable Characters who do me the honor to interest themselves in my welfare & behaviour, and as leaving the farm so soon may have an unsteady giddy-headed appearance, I had perhaps better lose a little money than hazard such people's esteem.

You see, Sir, with what freedom I lay before you all my little matters - little indeed to the World, but of the most important magnitude to me. - You are so good, that I trust I am not troublesome. - I have ~~both~~ heard and read a good deal of Philanthropy, Generosity and Greatness of soul, and when rounded with the flourish of declamatory periods of poured in the mellifluousness of Parnassian measure, they have a tolerable effect on a musical ear; but when these high sounding professions are compared with the very act and deed as they are usually performed, I do not think there is any thing in or belonging to Human Nature, so boldly disproportionate. - In fact, were it not for a very few of our Kind, among whom an honored Friend of mine that to you <sup>^ Sir</sup> I will not name is a distinguished individual, the very existence of Magnanimity, Generosity, and all their kindred Virtues, would be as much as question among Metaphysicians, as the existence of Witchcraft. - Perhaps the nature of man is not so much to blame for all this as the ~~curse~~ situation in which, by some miscarriage or other, he is placed in this world. - The poor, naked, helpless wretch, with such voracious appetites and such a famine of provision for them, is under a <sup>^ kind of</sup> cursed necessity of turning selfish in his own defence. - Except here & there a scelerate who seems to be a Scoundrel from the womb by Original Sin, thorough-paced selfishness is always a work of time. - Indeed in a little time we generally grow so attentive to ourselves and so regardless of others, that I have often in poetic frenzy looked on this world as one vast ocean, occupied and convulsed by innumerable vortices, each whirling round its centre, which vortices are the children of men; and that the great design, & merit of I may say so, of every particular vortex consists, in how wide it can extend the influence of its circle, and how much flouting trash it can suck in and absorb.

I know not ~~how~~ why I have got into this preaching vein, except it be to show you, Sir, that it is not my ignorance but my knowledge of mankind which makes me so much admire your goodness to your humble servant.

I hope this will find my amiable young acquaintance, John, recovered from his indisposition, and all the members of your charming fireside circle well and happy. I am sure I am anxiously interested in all their welfares: I wish it with all my soul; nay I believe I sometimes catch myself praying for it. - I'm not impatient of <sup>^ my own impotence under</sup> that immense debt which I owe to your goodness, but I wish and beseech that Being who has all good things in his hands to bless and reward you with all those comforts and pleasures which He knows I would bestow on you were they mine to give.

I shall return your books very soon. I only wish to give D.<sup>r</sup> Smith one other perusal which I will do in two or three days - I do not think that I must trouble you for another cargo, at least for some time, as I am going to apply to Leadbetter Symons on Gaging and to study my Sliding rule, Branan's rule &c. with all possible attention.

An apology for the impertinent length of this, epistle, would only add to the evil. I have the honor to be, Sir, your deeply indebted humble serv.<sup>t</sup>

Rob.<sup>t</sup> Burns