

protracting, slow, consuming illness which hangs over me will, I doubt much, my dear friend, arrest my sun before he has well reached his middle career, and will turn over the poet to far more important concerns than studying the brilliancy of wit, or the pathos of sentiment! However, hope is the cordial of the human heart, and I endeavour to cherish it as well as I can.

I am ashamed to ask another favour of you, because you have been so very good already; but my wife has a very particular friend, a young lady who sings well, to whom she wishes to present the *Scots Musical Museum*. If you have a spare copy, will you be so obliging as to send it by the very first fly, as I am anxious to have it soon.—Yours ever,
R. B.*

CCI.—TO MR. CUNNINGHAM.

BROW, *Sea-bathing quarters, 7th July 1796.*

MY DEAR CUNNINGHAM,—I received yours here this moment, and am indeed highly flattered with the approbation of the literary circle you mention; a literary circle inferior to none in the two kingdoms. Alas! my friend, I fear the voice of the bard will soon be heard among you no more! For these eight or ten months I have been ailing, sometimes bedfast and sometimes not; but these last three months I have been tortured with an excruciating rheumatism, which has reduced me to nearly the last stage. You actually would not know me if you saw me. Pale, emaciated, and so feeble, as occasionally to need help from my chair—my spirits fled! fled!—but I can no more on the subject—only the medical folks tell me that my last and only chance is bathing and country quarters, and riding. The deuce of the matter is this—when an exciseman is off duty, his salary is reduced to £35 instead of £50. What way, in the name of thrift, shall I maintain myself, and keep a horse

* "In this humble manner did poor Burns ask for a copy of a work to which he had contributed, *gratuitously*, not less than 184 *original, altered, and collected songs!*"—CROMEK.

in country quarters, with a wife and five children at home, on £35? I mention this, because I had intended to beg your utmost interest, and that of all the friends you can muster, to move our Commissioners of Excise to grant me the full salary; I dare say you know them all personally. If they do not grant it me, I must lay my account with an exit truly *en poëte*; if I die not of disease, I must perish with hunger.*

I have sent you one of the songs; the other my memory does not serve me with, and I have no copy here, but I shall be at home soon, when I will send it you. Apropos to being at home, Mrs. Burns threatens in a week or two to add one more to my paternal charge, which, if of the right gender, I intend shall be introduced to the world by the respectable designation of *Alexander Cunningham Burns*. My last was *James Glencairn*, so you can have no objection to the company of nobility. Farewell. R. B.

CCII.—TO MR. GILBERT BURNS.

10th July 1795.

DEAR BROTHER,—It will be no very pleasing news to you to be told that I am dangerously ill, and not likely to get better. An inveterate rheumatism has reduced me to such a state of debility, and my appetite is so totally gone, that I can scarcely stand on my legs. I have been a week at sea-bathing, and will continue there, or in a friend's house in the country, all the summer. God keep my wife and children; if I am taken from their head, they will be poor indeed. I have contracted one or two serious debts, partly from my illness these many months, partly from too much thoughtlessness as to expense when I came to town, that will cut in too much on the little I leave them in your hands. Remember me to my mother.—Yours, R. B.

* Not granted.