

## Notches on The Stick

"Burns' Clarinda: Brief Papers Concerning the Poet's Renowned Correspondent, Compiled from Various Sources by John D. Ross, L. L. D." the Rieburn Book Company, New York, 1897. Cloth; 250 p.

These documents are highly interesting, as elucidating a deeply romantic and, in some respects, mysterious, episode in the life of a man full of passionate impulses, if not of cross purposes, in love. Beside the full Sylvander correspondence, found in any collection of his prose writings, and the finest at least of his lyrics inspired by the Edinburgh charmer, we have here a biography of the heroine by her grandson, W. C. McLehose, and articles by John Muir, F. S. A. Scot; James Adams, M. D. Glasgow; Peter Ross, L. L. D.; Rev. Dr. P. Hately Waddell; Rev. T. C. Higgins, A. M.; by Principal Sharp, Alexander Smith, Thomas C. Latta, Robert Ford, John Stuart Blackie and others.

The purpose of the Compiler is expressed in his Preface, as follows: "It is safe to say that the memory of this gifted but unfortunate woman is held in high esteem for her genuine worth more than it was forty years ago. Then it was clouded because people did not understand, did not have the means of understanding, her character, her career, or the story of her innocent intimacy with the poet. Since then her life-story has been searched, been weighed, been commented on; the closest scrutiny has been bestowed on her actions, her words, her writings, and the most scalpel-like dissection has been made of her thoughts, so far as they have become recoverable. Out of all this she has emerged without a stain, with the early cloud rolled away, and with, as her only weakness, an acknowledged love for the poet in preference to the heartless scamp who wrecked her life. She once hoped that she might in time be united to the poet, but she never forgot she was a wedded wife. To her faithless husband she remained loyal, to her children she was a model mother, and to the end of her long life's journey she enjoyed the respect of her wide circle of devoted friends. . . . The volume is in reality a tribute to the memory of Clarinda. It could have been made much larger, . . . but enough has been presented, I think, to demonstrate that among the heroines of Burns, Agnes McLehose is not the least deserving of honor as an honest, a beautiful, and a gifted woman."

Dr. Waddell, who of all the writers in this book takes the most unfavorable view of Clarinda, is not inclined to consider her intercourse with the poet as innocent but of culpable wantonness. In discriminating between the two he seems to regard her as the greater sinner, inasmuch as her letters were calculated to stimulate his passion and to lure him on. "It was Clarinda's own faculty of rejoinder that stimulated to such efforts of eloquence; and his own love of victory, conjoined with his belief in the possibility of dissolving adamant with words, that carried him ultimately beyond the variances of his nature in such a perilous encounter. Alas! for such unlicensed and seductive war. For his own credit and peace of mind it should have been honestly abandoned when the inevitable issue was foreseen; and for her credit it should never have been renewed. For himself it was disastrous, and for her sorrowful. No good could come of it."

This gifted and unfortunate woman, memorable for this singular association with one of the greatest and most unhappy of poets, was born at Glasgow, April 1759, daughter of a reputable surgeon named Andrew Craig. Kindred to people of strong character and masterful intellect, it is not strange that she should from a child have attracted attention for her piquant and brilliant parts, as well as for her singular beauty. Agnes was a delicate child, and her survival from the period of infancy was a surprise to her people; yet she alone of all her family—one brother and four sisters—lived to a venerable age. Her education was as incomplete and as imperfect as was general in that age, even among women in the higher ranks of society; some rudimentary knowledge of English was the best part of her furnishing, and this she afterwards partially remedied when her love of literature was awakened. Having lost her mother at a tender age, and soon afterwards her only surviving sister, she was left—though still in her father's house and under his care,—without those invaluable counsels and that sympathy that are so potent in the correction of character. Yet to her latest years she affirmed that that "sainted mother" had left upon her heart an indelible impression, and that her memory had been a bond that held her to the right in

times of peril and trial. As a maiden she became noted for her beauty and the liveliness of her disposition, and among even the beauties of Glasgow was spoken of as "the pretty Miss Nancy." As in the case of many a fair one, her personal charms led to her chief misfortunes and her deepest sorrows. These commenced shortly after her return home from the boarding-school at Edinburgh, where she remained about six months.

"Mr. James McLehose," relates the author of this Memoir, "a young man of respectable connections, and a law agent in that city, had been disappointed in getting introduced to her; and when he learned that she was going to Edinburgh, he engaged all the seats in the stage coach, excepting the one taken for her. At that period the coach took the whole day to perform the journey between the two cities, stopping a considerable time for dinner on the road, which thus afforded Mr. McLehose an excellent opportunity of making himself agreeable—an opportunity which he took the utmost pains to improve, and with success, being possessed of an agreeable and attractive person and most insinuating manner. His deficiency of sound principle was hidden from general observation by great plausibility."

Though her friends did not encourage the match, she nevertheless married Mr. McLehose July 1776 while yet only seventeen, and her husband five years her senior. The remediless error soon appeared. She was a wild-bird, in the cage, with her wings clipped, and her husband was her keeper. Coldness and harshness soon blighted her nascent love. As she, herself confessed: "Only a short time had elapsed ere I perceived, with inexpressible regret, that our dispositions, tempers, and sentiments were so totally different as to banish all hope of happiness. Our disagreements rose to such a height, and my husband's treatment was so harsh, that it was thought advisable by my friends that a separation should take place, which accordingly followed in Dec. 1780." Her fourth child was born shortly after this event, and, as soon as it was possible, the three then living were by the action of her husband, under the law of Scotland at that time, removed from her and placed under the care of his people. "She parted with them with extreme reluctance, her father being both able and willing to maintain her and them; while her husband neglected his business and entered into every species of dissipation, so that he became unable to maintain his children." She found herself alone, the infant from her arms, even, having been committed to the charge of a hiring nurse."

Upon the advice of some friends, and in harmony with her own inclinations, to escape the scene of her misfortunes, she went in 1782 to reside in Edinburgh. To this city her husband followed her soon, and attempted to obtain an interview which she refused, though he wrote pleadingly: "Early tomorrow morning I leave this country forever, and therefore wish much to pass one quarter of an hour with you. Upon my word of honor, my dearest Nancy, it is the last night you probably will ever have an opportunity of seeing me in this world." From London where he lived for some time in a disreputable way, he wrote her a letter in a reproachful strain announcing his purpose of going across the ocean, and in this he observed: "The sooner you return to Glasgow the better, and take under your care and protection those endearing pledges of our once happier days, as none of my friends will have anything to do with them." This was true enough; and, with the mother's instinct, she lost no time in possessing herself of her children, but how to support them in Edinburgh was the question. "The income left me by my father being barely sufficient to board myself," she wrote, "I was now distressed how to support my three infants. I found arrears due for their board. This I paid; and the goodness of some worthy gentlemen in Glasgow procuring me a small annuity from the writers, and one from the surgeons, I again set out for Edinburgh with them in August 1782; and by the strictest economy, made my little income go as far as possible. The deficiency was always supplied by some worthy benevolent friends, whose kindness no time can erase from my grateful heart."

The deserted wife drew round her a circle of sympathetic and appreciative friends, and owing to her connections and her character some of them were in the higher intellectual and social circles, and became helpful to her. Among these was Lord Craig, her cousin-in-law, then an advocate at the Scottish bar, who had befriended her on her first arrival in Edinburgh, and continued through life her principal benefactor. At his death he left her an annuity, and made her son residuary legatee. She developed a taste for literature, and cultivated poetry, producing some songs of considerable merit; while by conversation and the study of the best

authors she acquired a good style of expression, so that her letters in the correspondence she afterwards maintained with Burns, were sometimes superior to his. "It is to be regretted," writes her grandson, "that so little of that correspondence has been preserved." Effort was made by Allan Cunningham, when publishing his complete Burns, to obtain her replies to the Sylvander correspondence, but without avail.

The second determining event of her life, was her introduction to Robert Burns, and the birth of her first deep and genuine affection. This occurred toward the end of the year 1767, at the house of a mutual friend, Miss Nimmo. After an evening spent in her company, the poet was able to make this declaration: "Of all God's creatures I ever could approach in the best way of friendship, you struck me with the deepest, the strongest, the most permanent impression; while she, on her part, avowed: 'Miss Nimmo can tell you how earnestly I had long pressed her to make us acquainted. I had a presentiment that we would derive pleasure from the society of each other.' The poet was then preparing to leave Edinburgh, but an accident which occurred on an evening when he had engaged to meet her, and which delayed his departure for several weeks, gave occasion for the singular, passionate, and, in some instances, affected and high flown correspondence, that more than all his other writings exhibits the extremes and contradictions of the poet's character. On his recovery he visited the lady, who signed herself 'Clarinda,' and still lingered for several months to enjoy her society, till at last he left the city. Once only did they meet after that, but he wrote her an occasional letter after his marriage to Jean, and indeed till within a brief period of his death. Burns was not the only literary person whose society she enjoyed. In later years the youthful Thomas Campbell, when prosecuting his studies at the University of Edinburgh, frequented her home. "The amiable Graham," the poet of "The Sabbath," James Gray, who wrote "Cuna of Choyd," and "The Sabbath among the Mountains," and Burns' friend, Robert Ainslie, a respectable writer, may merit especial mention. This latter gentleman, the author of the Memoir tells us, "proved throughout life a warm and steady friend."

He was an original visitor at Mrs. McLehose New Year parties, which were kept up for about forty years, and are still remembered by many of the younger guests for their great conviviality, to which the liveliness and vivacity of the hostess greatly contributed. Her husband, meanwhile, had contributed nothing to the maintenance of his children, though repeatedly urged to do so. After a disreputable career in London McLehose went to Jamaica, where he enjoyed a prosperity that was never shared by any of his relatives in Scotland. One of her boys fell ill during 1787, when the mother made a vain appeal to the faithless man who seemed not to care for his dying child. At last a letter did come expressing his wishes with regard to his surviving son and inviting the mother to come to Jamaica, which, singularly, and yet perhaps not unwisely—since it disabused her of any notion that she could live with him—she determined to do. She sailed from Leith on board a vessel named the Roselle, in February, 1792 having resolved, if possible to overlook the past and throw herself under her husband's protection; but upon arriving, after a tedious and uncomfortable voyage, she was so coldly received, that, finding her husband's affections more than ever alienated by his illicit relations with a colored mistress, she determined to return which she did in June following. After this she continued to reside in Edinburgh, until her death in 1843, thirty-one years after her husband's decease, and forty-five after that of Burns. To the memory of the poet—whose rank and greatness in the world's list of poets she lived fully to appreciate,—she was always devoted. The mention of his name would bring the quick tears when many years had passed. In her private diary, forty years after the date of her last interview with the poet she has this entry:—"6th Dec. 1781.—This day I never can forget. Parted with Robert Burns in the year 1791, never more to meet in this world. Oh, may we meet in Heaven!"

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Tea and Wines

One of the writers (James Adams) whose work appears in this book gives us an interesting glimpse of Clarinda in her old age as she appeared at an evening social. "There were present a chirpy old lady who, from subsequent information, I know must have been about seventy-five years of age but it was a considerable time afterwards I learned that in her an angel had entertained me unawares; and that the 'Mrs. McLehose,' with whom I shook hands and exchanged ordinary civilities during the evening was the far-famed 'Clarinda' mistress of the soul of Burns. It was evident that she was an intimate friend, and highly regarded by the household. Singing was in order, and a number of Scotch songs were rendered. At last a solo entitled 'My wife has taken the Gae,' was rendered by a young man with a 'boyish, Lord Roseberry cast of countenance,' who 'enacted the henpecked husband deprecating the sulks of his wife,' till the effect became 'irresistibly ludicrous.' The merriment became contagious, and the company was convulsed with sympathetic laughter. Clarinda in particular went off into frequent kinks, ejaculating now and again 'Oh stop him! take him away! put him out!' while he noisily made occasional pauses 'gravelly resuming as an interval of quiet permitted. When he finished she declared while breathlessly panting and wiping her eyes, that 'she did not know what he deserved for causing her to make such an object of herself.' I remember being strongly impressed with the old lady's vivacious manner and lively spirits, so rare in one of her advanced years."

Whatever may be said of the sincerity and depth of Burns' attachment to Agnes McLehose—and there is little doubt of her passionate affection for him,—she has been the inspiration of several of the finest of love songs in any language. That artless strain wherewith he laments her departure might well bespeak a feeling heart; but "My Nannie's Awa" is also like a voice from the soul of nature,—the soaring lark, and the gray dawn, the leaping lamb and the dew wet violet are in it. "Clarinda, mistress of my soul," and "Ance mair I hail thee, thou gloomy December," bespeak our tears; but if there were none of these, we have still that heart-breaking "Ae Fond Kiss," a lyric four lines of which Scott has declared, "contain the essence of a thousand love tales."

"Had we never loved sae kindly,  
Had we never loved sae blindly,  
Never met—or never parted,  
We had ne'er been broken-hearted."

A friend (Hon. Charles H. Collins) writes: "In February following the 'Gloomy December,' Burns wrote the following, referring to Clarinda. By some means Dr. Ross has missed, or for some reason has omitted it."

"Behold the hour, the boat, arrive;  
Thou goest, thou darling of my heart!  
Severed from thee can I survive?  
But fate has willed, and we must part.  
I'll often greet this surging swell,  
Yon distant isle will often hail:  
E'en here I took the last farewell,  
There latest marked her vanish'd sail!"

"Along the solitary shore,  
While fitting sea fowl round me cry,  
Across the rolling, dashing roar,  
I'll westward turn my wistful eye!  
Happy, thou Indian grove, I'll say,  
Where now my Nancy's path may be;  
While thro' thy sweets she loves to stray,  
O tell me does she muse on me!"

It is a coincidence worth mentioning that the "Roselle," the vessel Clarinda sailed in to Jamaica, was the one in which Burns had intended to sail to the same island a few years earlier.

For frontispiece Dr. Ross' book has the silhouette portrait, that appears in Fatserson's six volume edition of the poet's works, edited by Scott Douglas, the original of which long adorned Clarinda's room, but is now, it is said the property of Mr. William Campbell of Cammo, but will ultimately be placed in the National Portrait Gallery. The following letters will explain its origin:

Thursday Noon, February 7, 1788.

"I shall go tomorrow forenoon to Miers alone. What size do you want it about? Oh Sylvander, if you wish my peace, let friendship be the word between us. I tremble at more."

Thursday Night, February 7, 1788.

"I thank you for going to Miers. Urge him for necessity calls, to have it done by the middle of next week, Wednesday the latest day. I want it for a breast pin to wear next my heart. I propose to keep sacred set times to wander in the woods and wilds for meditation on you. Then, and only then your lovely image shall be produced to the day, with a reverence akin to devotion."

It continued in the poet's possession until the time of his death. It belongs to the time of her youth, and shows her in all the grace and brightness of her voluptuous womanhood. The pose of her figure and the contour of her face bespeak her vivacity and beauty. She was formed in heart to entertain romantic friendships,—but this one grew to something more, and it was herself, more than Burns that she had to strive against. Unhappy Clarinda! Woman of the disappointed heart,—she loved much, and much may be forgiven her. Who can read her written words without feeling: "Never were there two hearts formed so exactly alike as ours. Oh, let the scenes of Nature remind you of Clarinda! In winter remember the dark shades of her fate; in summer the warmth of her friendship; in autumn, her glowing wish to bestow plenty on all; and let spring animate you with hopes that your friend may yet surmount the wintry blasts of life, and revive to taste a springtime of happiness. At all events, Sylvander, the storms of life will quickly pass, and 'one unbounded spring encircle all.' Love there is not a crime. I charge you to meet me there."

It is too much to hope that they have met, and found no harm in love?

PASTOR FELIX.

When chaffs the heart to ashes in its pain,  
Or withers in its vain desire,  
Tears are the benediction of the rain  
Falling to quench the fire.—Chas. G. D. Roberts.

