# THE MANUSCRIPT OF «AULD LANG SYNE.»

BY CUYLER REYNOLDS.

[WILLIAM MCQUHAE, the painter of the portrait of Robert Burns which is shown on the opposite page, was born in the parish of Balmaghie, North Britain, May 10, 1779. From there he moved to Edinburgh, where he and Burns roomed together. He early exhibited remarkable talent as a painter, and while rooming with Burns he painted from life this portrait, which was then pronounced a good likeness.

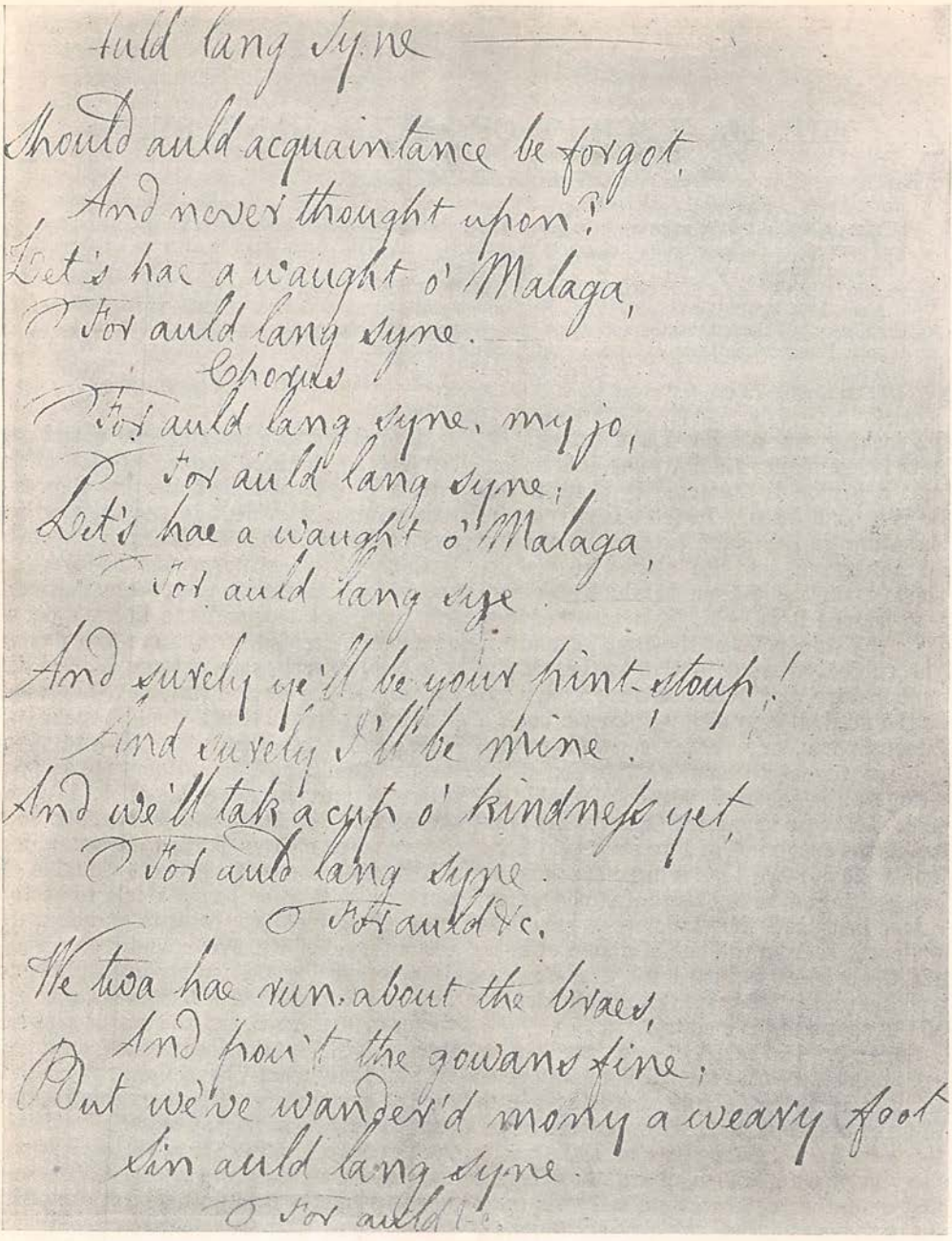
About 1805 Mr. McQuhae came to America, bringing with him the picture, which he presented to an art society in Philadelphia; this society disbanded, and he regained possession of it. While in a small town in Pennsylvania he was taken ill. A friend was very kind to him during his illness, and he gave him this portrait as a mark of his appreciation. It then passed into the possession of John McQuhae, William McQuhae's son, and grandfather of the writer. *George M. Diven, Jr.*]

IN looking over a collection of autographs, or in examining a solitary one, it is seldom that a person is attracted by them unless he is a connoisseur. In most instances the signature is the chief excuse for valuing an autograph, and its attractiveness depends upon the esteem in which the man who penned it is held. This is, of course, from the standpoint of the casual examiner. The subject treated in the writing is the main feature, and if the words are recognized as the original copy of a well-known book, a famous poem, or a letter conveying some noble sentiment, then one's estimation of the autograph is enhanced to a considerable extent. All these important features are present in the autograph of Burns's «Auld Lang Syne.» It is more than a mere specimen of handwriting or the signature of a famous man, valued because it shows the pen-touch of the writer; it is from the pen of a man of note, and the subject, or rather the words, are so well known that they speak the individuality of the poet and his country.

So few original copies of celebrated poems are in existence that the beholding of one of them is cause for interest, inducing one to think of the many thousands who have heard those words, but have never seen the poet's face, his picture, or his handwriting. Gazing first upon the poet's picture, and then upon the paper on which he has looked and touched, one feels as though brought into close contact with him.

The late Chancellor John V. L. Pruyn of Albany, New York, was the successful purchaser of «Auld Lang Syne,» and the one to make the autograph one of America's treasures. The facts regarding its removal to this country are of peculiar interest, and they bring the history of the autograph, now more than a century old, up to date.

Mr. Pruyn was a lover of curios, and particularly of the kind connected with an interesting past; and his collecting showed a refinement not evident in the taste of the usual collector. In 1859 the centennial of the birthday of Robert Burns was made the occasion for a celebration in different cities of the United States; and the literary people of Albany decided to observe the day by memorial exercises in a large hall on the evening of the day. Previous to the event Mr. Pruyn planned that it would be a feature if he could secure this autograph copy of the poet's «Auld Lang Syne.» Henry Stevens was a famous purchaser for collections in those days, supplying Mr. James Lenox, Mr. John Carter Brown, the British Museum, and others, with some of the most valuable old works; and thereby hangs a tale to be told later. He owned the verses in question. He was a friend of Mr. Pruyn, and a correspondence regarding the matter in hand began. The result was that Mr. Stevens sold the verses to Mr. Pruyn, and the manuscript was intrusted to Captain Moody, who guaranteed that it should reach Chancellor Pruyn in time for the celebration. His steamship reached New York late on the day of the celebration, leaving but a few hours to get it to Albany, or the mission would prove fruitless. The only way was for the captain to select one of his trusty men. With this special messenger it was sent from the steamer and conveyed with all despatch directly to the hall in Albany. Mr. Pruyn was all-expectant when, during the exercises, he was called from the hall. Though he was gone only a moment, all interest in what was going on upon the stage was lost for the time being. Another swing of the door, and Mr. Pruyn entered, waving aloft the manuscript, and exclaiming, «It is here!» With exultant delight, and amid


auld lang syne

Should auld acquaintance be forgot
And never thought upon?
Let's hae a waught o' Malaga,
For auld lang syne.

Chorus

For auld lang syne, my jo,
For auld lang syne;
Let's hae a waught o' Malaga,
For auld lang syne.

And surely ye'll be your pint-stoup!
And surely I'll be mine.
And we'll tak a cup o' kindness yet,
For auld lang syne.

For auld &c.

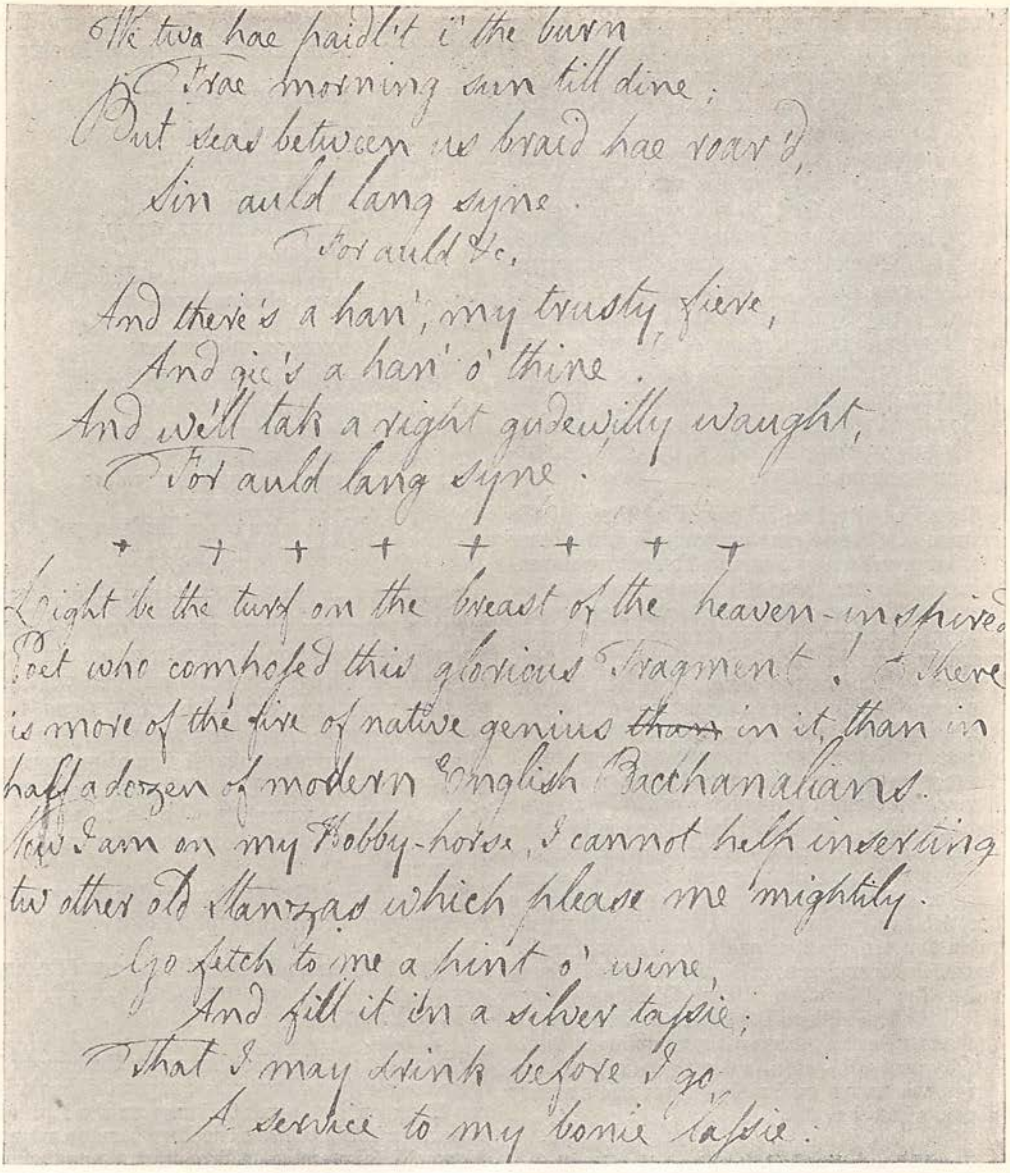
We twa hae run about the braes,
And pou'it the gowans fine;
But we've wander'd mony a weary foot
Sin auld lang syne.

For auld &c.

cries of «Auld Lang Syne» is with us!» Chancellor Pruyn advanced to the stage and read the poem through. Hardly could the people be prevented from breaking in upon him; and when it was proposed to sing it through, enthusiasm knew no bounds. Never did a chorus so willingly lend aid, and the familiar air swelled forth in mighty volume.

The cherished page was bound within Russia-leather covers, and with it were placed a letter to Dr. Richmond from Burns, dated February 7, 1788, proving the identity of the writing in the poem, and also the letter written to Chancellor Pruyn by Henry Stevens when sending the poem to him.

The poem is contained on one sheet of paper. Its size is no larger than this printed one, yet Mrs. Pruyn has refused an offer of


We twa hae paidl't i' the burn
Frae morning sun till dine;
But seas between us braid hae roar'd,
Sin auld lang syne.
For auld &c.

And there's a han', my trusty fiere,
And gie's a han' o' thine.
And we'll tak a right gudewilly waught,
For auld lang syne.

+ + + + + + + +

Light be the turf on the breast of the heaven-inspired Poet who composed this glorious Fragment! O there is more of the fire of native genius ~~than~~ in it, than in half a dozen of modern English Bacchanalians. Now I am on my Hobby-horse, I cannot help inserting two other old stanzas which please me mightily.

Go fetch to me a pint o' wine,
And fill it in a silver tassie;
That I may drink before I go,
A service to my bonie lassie:

three thousand dollars for it. On one side, in a remarkably distinct hand, are penned three verses and a chorus. The reading on the other side is this:

We twa hae paidl't i' the burn
Frae morning sun till dine;
But seas between us braid hae roar'd
Sin auld lang syne.
For auld, etc.

And there 's a han', my trusty fiere,
And gie 's a han' o' thine!
And we 'll tak a right gudewilly waught,
For auld lang syne.

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Light be the turf on the breast of the heaven-inspired Poet who composed this glorious Fragment! O there is more of the fire of native genius in it, than in half a dozen of modern English Bacchanalians.

Now I am on my Hobby-horse, I cannot help inserting two other old stanzas which please me mightily.

Go fetch to me a pint o' wine,
And fill it in a silver tassie;
That I may drink before I go
A service to my bonie lassie.

It would seem as if the words «Light be the turf on the breast of the heaven-inspired

Poet,» which Burns addressed in this letter to Mrs. Dunlop, were intended to lead her to infer that he was not the composer of any of the verses. Two theories are put forth in regard to the use of these words. Some hold that he was of a modest disposition, and as he was loath to place his name to all he wrote, desiring first to obtain a free criticism, he put it forth in the light of another's writing. The other theory, and the one generally vouchsafed in explanatory notes to «Auld Lang Syne» as it appears in various publications, is that *some* of the verses are original, while others are copied from an anonymous source. Thus there appears the following in «Songs of Scotland, adapted to their appropriate melodies, by George Farquhar Graham, 1853»:

Burns admitted to Johnson that three of the stanzas of «Lang Syne» only were old, the other two being written by himself. These three stanzas relate to the cup, the pint-stoup, and a gude willie waught. The two relate to innocent amusements of youth contrasted with care and troubles of maturer age. In introducing this song to Mrs. Dunlop of Dunlop, the daughter of Sir Thomas Wallace of Craigie, and a descendant of the race of Elderslie, the poet says: «Is not the Scotch phrase auld lang syne exceedingly expressive? There is an old song and tune (of this name) which have often thrilled through my soul. . . . Light be the turf . . .» Shield introduced it into the overture of the opera of «Rosina» by Brooks, produced in 1783 at Covent Garden. In the last movement of the overture it serves as an imitation for Scottish bagpipe tune, in which the oboe is substituted for the chanter and the bassoon for the drone. In Cummings's collection the air is found under the title «The Miller's Wedding.» Gow called it «The Miller's Daughter,» and again «Sir Alexander Don's Strathspey,» in compliment to the late baronet of Newton-don, in the county of Roxburgh, who was a good violin-player and a steady patron of musical art.

It will be noticed that this authority states that Burns says: «Is not the Scotch phrase auld lang syne exceedingly expressive? There is an old song and tune,» etc. Evidently the latter expression was used in the opening page of the letter to Mrs. Dunlop, which Stevens did not secure, though he had the better part—the poem. If this is not the case, continued repetition has changed, or rather added to, the letter Burns wrote on the page between the verses of the poem.

Place the form of «Auld Lang Syne» as it is sung to-day beside the original, and the vast difference is at once apparent. The copies here presented are taken from two different works—the first and older form from Graham's «Songs of Scotland,» and the latter from «The Household Book of Poetry»:

EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.

SHOULD auld acquaintance be forgot,
And never thought upon?
Let 's hae a waught o' Malaga,
For auld lang syne.
For auld lang syne, my jo,
For auld lang syne,
Let 's hae a waught o' Malaga,
For auld lang syne.

NINETEENTH CENTURY.

SHOULD auld acquaintance be forgot,
And never brought to min'?
Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
And days o' lang syne?
For auld lang syne, my dear,
For auld lang syne,
We 'll tak a cup o' kindness yet
For auld lang syne.

Every line of the song as it is now found in print, no matter what version one selects, will show a change of words, or at least a different spelling, from the original writing of Burns as here copied directly from his own autograph. As in the above «my jo» is changed to «my dear,» so in the other verses the «. . . willy waught» of Burns is changed to «. . . willie waught,» «han'» to «hand,» «pint stoup» to «pint stowp,» and «wander'd» to «wandered.»

The letter of Mr. Stevens to Mr. Pruyn accompanying the autograph reads:

VERMONT HOUSE, 49 CAMDEN SQUARE,
LONDON, Jan. 7, 1859.

J. V. L. PRUYN,
Albany.

MY DEAR SIR: «Light be the turf on the breast of the heaven-inspired Poet who composed this glorious Fragment!» So wrote Burns on the 17th of December, 1788, to his friend Mrs. Dunlop, whom he would feign make believe that «Auld Lang Syne» came fra smither han'. It is now acknowledged to have been based «on an old song,» but it received its fire from Burns.

The annexed fragment containing «Auld Lang Syne» is part of a letter to Mrs. Dunlop, and is beyond all question in the autograph of Burns. I have placed beside it a characteristic letter of the poet, dated February, 1788, bearing his signature, and addressed to Dr. Richmond.

The autograph of «Auld Lang Syne» was for many years in the possession of my late friend William Pickering the publisher, and after his death it fell under Sotheby's hammer in 1855 to me, at a price which I dare not name, but which would have gladdened the hearts of the poet and his poor Jean, had they in time reaped the benefit. «For America» were the only words of the

auctioneer that accompanied the fall of the hammer, and as I pocketed the precious relic «For America» was many times repeated by the poets and scholars present, who had assembled to witness the sale, with a tone of reluctance at the idea of its leaving the country that told more of the value of the relic than the gold I paid for it.

Since then I have been importuned to part with it, both in England and Scotland; but my reply has always been: «For America, where Burns is more read, more admired, and more universally appreciated than elsewhere, aye, than [he] was in his own Scotland, I procured it, and thither it must go.»

I am sorry to part with «Auld Lang Syne» in the handwriting of Burns. So I was with the books of Washington now in the Boston Athenæum, and the sculptures of Nineveh, now belonging to the New York Historical Society, presented by Mr. Lenox. But I do not for one moment regret that I have had the opportunity, and been the means, of securing these things to my country. They are all now in good hands and in the right place. Pray guard your treasure, and let Americans sing «Auld Lang Syne» from the autograph of Burns every hundred years on the 25th of January, in commemoration of his birthday, 1759.

I am, my dear Pruyn,
For auld lang syne,
Yours sincerely,
HENRY STEVENS,
G. M. B.

This was the form in which Mr. Stevens always signed his name. Not every one knew the meaning of the three letters «G. M. B.» He was proud of his birthplace, and they stand for Green Mountain Boy.

This story is told in regard to him. He supplied Mr. Lenox and Mr. John Carter Brown with many a rare old copy of the Bible. He secured in England what he considered a treasure, and wrote two letters offering it for sale. In the one he wrote: «If you want it, let me know at once before old Brown gets it»; and in the other he said: «Answer immediately, or old Lenox will get it.» Unfortunately, he was absent-minded at a most critical moment, and mailed each letter to the wrong person. The result was disastrous. It cut off all further business with both men, who had paid thousands of dollars to him. As a collector he had a great reputation, and was an authority on old manuscripts. His services to Mr. Pruyn were highly appreciated by him, and now the single sheet of paper with the words known all over the world is valued at thousands of dollars by Mrs. Pruyn, and locked securely in her safe, to be handled only on rare occasions.

## «FILL ME FANCY'S CELL.»

BY JOHN VANCE CHENEY.

OFF, my thought, with the bee,
Go seek the blossom-bell;
Sail it over the airy sea,
To the sweet-o'-heart, to the elfin tree;
Mate with the bee, and happy roam,
Follow him off, and follow him home:
Go, fair and fleet,
And bring me sweet,
Bring from the blossom-bell
Honey and melody—
Fill me Fancy's cell.

Thought, go journey and sing,
Go drink in the honey-well;
Belt yourself with his robber's rings,
With the mellow sun-gold yellow your wings;
Follow your guide wherever he ride,
The dear little thief of the summertide:
Go, fair and fleet,
And bring me sweet,
Bring from the blossom-bell
Honey and melody—
Fill me Fancy's cell.

PAINTED BY WILLIAM MCQUHAE. ENGRAVED BY T. JOHNSON.

I am ever
My dear Sir, your
Robt Burns