

Tam O' Shanter and Other Poems

Robert Buns

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Tam O' Shanter and Other Poems

Robert Burns

Tam O' Shanter

A Tale.

"Of Brownie and of Bogillie full is this Buke."

Gawin Douglas.

When chapman billies leave the street,
And drouthy neibors, neibors, meet;
As market days are wearing late,
And folk begin to tak the gate,
While we sit bousing at the nappy,
An' getting fou and unco happy,
We think na on the lang Scots miles,
The mosses, waters, slaps and stiles,
That lie between us and our hame,
Where sits our sulky, sullen dame,
Gathering her brows like gathering storm,
Nursing her wrath to keep it warm.

This truth fand honest Tam o' Shanter,
As he frae Ayr ae night did canter:
(Auld Ayr, wham ne'er a town surpasses,
For honest men and bonie lasses).

O Tam! had'st thou but been sae wise,
As taen thy ain wife Kate's advice!
She tauld thee weel thou was a skellum,
A blethering, blustering, drunken blellum;
That frae November till October,
Ae market-day thou was na sober;
That ilka melder wi' the Miller,
Thou sat as lang as thou had siller;
That ev'ry naig was ca'd a shoe on
The Smith and thee gat roarin' fou on;
That at the Lord's house, ev'n on Sunday,
Thou drank wi' Kirkton Jean till Monday,
She prophesied that late or soon,
Thou wad be found, deep drown'd in Doon,
Or catch'd wi' warlocks in the mirk,
By Alloway's auld, haunted kirk.

Ah, gentle dames! it gars me greet,
To think how mony counsels sweet,

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How mony lengthen'd, sage advices,
The husband frae the wife despises!

But to our tale: Ae market night,
Tam had got planted unco right,
Fast by an ingle, bleezing finely,
Wi' reaming sAats, that drank divinely;
And at his elbow, Souter Johnie,
His ancient, trusty, droughthy crony:
Tam lo'ed him like a very brither;
They had been fou for weeks thegither.
The night drave on wi' sangs an' clatter;
And aye the ale was growing better:
The Landlady and Tam grew gracious,
Wi' favours secret, sweet, and precious:
The Souter tauld his queerest stories;
The Landlord's laugh was ready chorus:
The storm without might rair and rustle,
Tam did na mind the storm a whistle.

Care, mad to see a man sae happy,
E'en drown'd himsel amang the nappy.
As bees flee hame wi' lades o' treasure,
The minutes wing'd their way wi' pleasure:
Kings may be blest, but Tam was glorious,
O'er a' the ills o' life victorious!

But pleasures are like poppies spread,
You seize the flow'r, its bloom is shed;
Or like the snow falls in the river,
A moment white—then melts for ever;
Or like the Borealis race,
That flit ere you can point their place;
Or like the Rainbow's lovely form
Evanishing amid the storm. —
Nae man can tether Time nor Tide,
The hour approaches Tam maun ride;
That hour, o' night's black arch the key—stane,
That dreary hour he mounts his beast in;
And sic a night he taks the road in,
As ne'er poor sinner was abroad in.

The wind blew as 'twad blawn its last;
The rattling showers rose on the blast;
The speedy gleams the darkness swallow'd;
Loud, deep, and lang, the thunder bellow'd:
That night, a child might understand,
The deil had business on his hand.

Weel—mounted on his grey mare, Meg,
A better never lifted leg,

and,
The deil had business on his hand.

Weel-mounted on his grey mare, Meg,
A better never lifted leg,
Tam skelpit on thro' dub and mire,
Despising wind, and rain, and fire;
Whiles holding fast his gude blue bonnet,
Whiles crooning o'er some auld Scots sonnet,
Whiles glow'rin round wi' prudent cares,
Lest bogles catch him unawares;
Kirk-Alloway was drawing nigh,
Where ghaists and houlets nightly cry.

By this time he was cross the ford,
Where in the snaw the chapman smoor'd;
And past the birks and meikle stane,
Where drunken Charlie brak's neck-bane;
And thro' the whins, and by the cairn,
Where hunters fand the murder'd bairn;
And near the thorn, aboon the well,
Where Mungo's mither hang'd hersel'.
Before him Doon pours all his floods,
The doubling storm roars thro' the woods,
The lightnings flash from pole to pole,
Near and more near the thunders roll,
When, glimmering thro' the groaning trees,
Kirk-Alloway seem'd in a bleeze,
Thro' ilka bore the beams were glancing,
And loud resounded mirth and dancing.

Inspiring bold John Barleycorn!
What dangers thou canst make us scorn!
Wi' tippenny, we fear nae evil;
Wi' usquabae, we'll face the devil!
The swats sae ream'd in Tammie's noddle,
Fair play, he car'd na deils a boddle,
But Maggie stood, right sair astonish'd,
Till, by the heel and hand admonish'd,
She ventur'd forward on the light;
And, wow! Tam saw an unco sight!

Warlocks and witches in a dance:
Nae cotillon, brent new frae France,
But hornpipes, jigs, strathspeys, and reels,
Put life and mettle in their heels.
A winnock-bunker in the east,
There sat auld Nick, in shape o' beast;
A towzie tyke, black, grim, and large,
To gie them music was his charge:
He screw'd the pipes and gart them skirl,

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Till roof and rafters a' did dirl. –
Coffins stood round, like open presses,
That shaw'd the Dead in their last dresses;
And (by some devilish cantraip sleight)
Each in its cauld hand held a light.
By which heroic Tam was able
To note upon the haly table,
A murderer's banes, in gibbet-airns;
Twa span-lang, wee, unchristened bairns;
A thief, new-cutted frae a rape,
Wi' his last gasp his gabudid gape;
Five tomahawks, wi' blude red-rusted:
Five scimitars, wi' murder crusted;
A garter which a babe had strangled:
A knife, a father's throat had mangled.
Whom his ain son of life bereft,
The grey-hairs yet stack to the heft;
Wi' mair of horrible and awfu',
Which even to name wad be unlawfu'.

As Tammie glowr'd, amaz'd, and curious,
The mirth and fun grew fast and furious;
The Piper loud and louder blew,
The dancers quick and quicker flew,
The reel'd, they set, they cross'd, they cleekit,
Till ilka carlin swat and reekit,
And coost her duddies to the wark,
And linkit at it in her sark!

Now Tam, O Tam! had they been queans,
A' plump and strapping in their teens!
Their sarks, instead o' creeshie flainen,
Been snaw-white seventeen hunder linen!–
Thir breeks o' mine, my only pair,
That ance were plush o' guid blue hair,
I wad hae gien them off my hurdies,
For ae blink o' the bonie burdies!
But wither'd beldams, auld and droll,
Rigwoodie hags wad spean a foal,
Louping an' flinging on a crummock.
I wonder did na turn thy stomach.

But Tam kent what was what fu' brawlie:
There was ae winsome wench and waulie
That night enlisted in the core,
Lang after ken'd on Carrick shore;
(For mony a beast to dead she shot,
And perish'd mony a bonie boat,
And shook baith meikle corn and bear,
And kept the country-side in fear);
Her cutty sark, o' Paisley harn,

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That while a lassie she had worn,
In longitude tho' sorely scanty,
It was her best, and she was vauntie.
Ah! little ken'd thy reverend grannie,
That sark she coft for her wee Nannie,
Wi' twa pund Scots ('twas a' her riches),
Wad ever grac'd a dance of witches!

But here my Muse her wing maun cour,
Sic flights are far beyond her power;
To sing how Nannie lap and flang,
(A souple jade she was and strang),
And how Tam stood, like ane bewithc'd,
And thought his very een enrich'd:
Even Satan glowr'd, and fidg'd fu' fain,
And hotch'd and blew wi' might and main:
Till first ae caper, syne anither,
Tam tint his reason a thegither,
And roars out, "Weel done, Cutty-sark!"
And in an instant all was dark:
And scarcely had he Maggie rallied.
When out the hellish legion sallied.

As bees bizz out wi' angry fyke,
When plundering herds assail their byke;
As open pussie's mortal foes,
When, pop! she starts before their nose;
As eager runs the market-crowd,
When "Catch the thief!" resounds aloud;
So Maggie runs, the witches follow,
Wi' mony an eldritch skreich and hollow.

Ah, Tam! Ah, Tam! thou'll get thy fairin!
In hell, they'll roast thee like a herrin!
In vain thy Kate awaits thy comin!
Kate soon will be a woefu' woman!
Now, do thy speedy-utmost, Meg,
And win the key-stone o' the brig;^1
There, at them thou thy tail may toss,
A running stream they dare na cross.
But ere the keystone she could make,
The fient a tail she had to shake!
For Nannie, far before the rest,
Hard upon noble Maggie prest,
And flew at Tam wi' furious ettle;
But little wist she Maggie's mettle!
Ae spring brought off her master hale,
But left behind her ain grey tail:
The carlin claut her by the rump,
And left poor Maggie scarce a stump.

Now, wha this tale o' truth shall read,
Ilk man and mother's son, take heed:
Whene'er to Drink you are inclin'd,
Or Cutty-sarks rin in your mind,
Think ye may buy the joys o'er dear;
Remember Tam o' Shanter's mare.

To A Mouse, On Turning Her Up In Her Nest With The Plough, November, 1785

Wee, sleekit, cow'rin, tim'rous beastie,
O, what a panic's in thy breastie!
Thou need na start awa sae hasty,
Wi' bickering brattle!
I wad be laith to rin an' chase thee,
Wi' murd'ring pattle!

I'm truly sorry man's dominion,
Has broken nature's social union,
An' justifies that ill opinion,
Which makes thee startle
At me, thy poor, earth-born companion,
An' fellow-mortal!

I doubt na, whiles, but thou may thieve;
What then? poor beastie, thou maun live!
A daimen icker in a thrave
'S a sma' request;
I'll get a blessin wi' the lave,
An' never miss't!

Thy wee bit housie, too, in ruin!
It's silly wa's the win's are strewin!
An' naething, now, to big a new ane,
O' foggage green!
An' bleak December's winds ensuin,
Baith snell an' keen!

Thou saw the fields laid bare an' waste,
An' weary winter comin fast,
An' cozie here, beneath the blast,
Thou thought to dwell—
Till crash! the cruel coulter past
Out thro' thy cell.

That wee bit heap o' leaves an' stibble,
Has cost thee mony a weary nibble!
Now thou's turn'd out, for a' thy trouble,

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But house or hald,
To thole the winter's sleety dribble,
An' cranreuch cauld!

But, Mousie, thou art no thy lane,
In proving foresight may be vain;
The best-laid schemes o' mice an' men
Gang aft agley,
An'lea'e us nought but grief an' pain,
For promis'd joy!

Still thou art blest, compar'd wi' me
The present only toucheth thee:
But, Och! I backward cast my e'e
On prospects drear!
An' forward, tho' I canna see,
I guess an' fear!

Death and Doctor Hornbook

A True Story

Some books are lies frae end to end,
And some great lies were never penn'd:
Ev'n ministers they hae been kenn'd,
In holy rapture,
A rousing whid at times to vend,
And nail't wi' Scripture.

But this that I am gaun to tell,
Which lately on a night befell,
Is just as true's the Deil's in hell
Or Dublin city:
That e'er he nearer comes oursel'
'S a muckle pity.

The clachan yill had made me canty,
I was na fou, but just had plenty;
I stacher'd whiles, but yet too tent aye
To free the ditches;
An' hillocks, stanes, an' bushes, kenn'd eye
Frae ghaists an' witches.

The rising moon began to glowre
The distant Cumnock hills out-owre:
To count her horns, wi' a my pow'r,
I set mysel';
But whether she had three or four,

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I cou'd na tell.

I was come round about the hill,
An' todlin down on Willie's mill,
Setting my staff wi' a' my skill,
To keep me sicker;
Tho' leeward whiles, against my will,
I took a bicker.

I there wi' Something did forgather,
That pat me in an eerie swither;
An' awfu' scythe, out-owre ae shouther,
Clear-dangling, hang;
A three-tae'd leister on the ither
Lay, large an' lang.

Its stature seem'd lang Scotch ells twa,
The queerest shape that e'er I saw,
For fient a wame it had ava;
And then its shanks,
They were as thin, as sharp an' sma'
As cheeks o' branks.

"Guid-een," quo' I; "Friend! hae ye been mawin,
When ither folk are busy sawin!"¹
I seem'd to make a kind o' stan'
But naething spak;
At length, says I, "Friend! whare ye gaun?
Will ye go back?"

It spak right howe, – "My name is Death,
But be na fley'd." – Quoth I, "Guid faith,
Ye're maybe come to stap my breath;
But tent me, billie;
I red ye weel, tak care o' skaith
See, there's a gully!"

"Gudeman," quo' he, "put up your whittle,
I'm no designed to try its mettle;
But if I did, I wad be kittle
To be mislear'd;
I wad na mind it, no that spittle
Out-owre my beard."

"Weel, weel!" says I, "a bargain be't;
Come, gie's your hand, an' sae we're gree't;
We'll ease our shanks an tak a seat –
Come, gie's your news;
This while ye hae been mony a gate,
At mony a house."²

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[Footnote 1: This recontre happened in seed-time, 1785. – R.B.]

[Footnote 2: An epidemical fever was then raging in that country. – R.B.]

"Ay, ay!" quo' he, an' shook his head,
"It's e'en a lang, lang time indeed
Sin' I began to nick the thread,
An' choke the breath:
Folk maun do something for their bread,
An' sae maun Death.

"Sax thousand years are near-hand fled
Sin' I was to the butching bred,
An' mony a scheme in vain's been laid,
To stap or scar me;
Till ane Hornbook's³ ta'en up the trade,
And faith! he'll waur me.

"Ye ken Hornbook i' the clachan,
Deil mak his king's-hood in spleuchan!
He's grown sae weel acquaint wi' Buchan⁴
And ither chaps,
The weans haud out their fingers laughin,
An' pouk my hips.

"See, here's a scythe, an' there's dart,
They hae pierc'd mony a gallant heart;
But Doctor Hornbook, wi' his art
An' cursed skill,
Has made them baith no worth a f-t,
Damn'd haet they'll kill!

"'Twas but yestreen, nae farther gane,
I threw a noble throw at ane;
Wi' less, I'm sure, I've hundreds slain;
But deil-ma-care,
It just play'd dirl on the bane,
But did nae mair.

"Hornbook was by, wi' ready art,
An' had sae fortify'd the part,

[Footnote 3: This gentleman, Dr. Hornbook, is professionally a brother of the sovereign Order of the Ferula; but, by intuition and inspiration, is at once an apothecary, surgeon, and physician. – R.B.]

[Footnote 4: Burchan's Domestic Medicine. – R.B.]

That when I looked to my dart,
It was sae blunt,
Fient haet o't wad hae pierc'd the heart

Of a kail-runt.

"I drew my scythe in sic a fury,
I near-hand cowpit wi' my hurry,
But yet the bauld Apothecary
Withstood the shock;
I might as weel hae tried a quarry
O' hard whin rock.

"Ev'n them he canna get attended,
Altho' their face he ne'er had kend it,
Just-in a kail-blade, an' sent it,
As soon's he smells 't,
Baith their disease, and what will mend it,
At once he tells 't.

"And then, a' doctor's saws an' whittles,
Of a' dimensions, shapes, an' mettles,
A' kind o' boxes, mugs, an' bottles,
He's sure to hae;
Their Latin names as fast he rattles
as A B C.

"Calces o' fossils, earths, and trees;
True sal-marinum o' the seas;
The farina of beans an' pease,
He has't in plenty;
Aqua-fontis, what you please,
He can content ye.

"Forbye some new, uncommon weapons,
Urinus spiritus of capons;
Or mite-horn shavings, filings, scrapings,
Distill'd per se;
Sal-alkali o' midge-tail clippings,
And mony mae."

"Waes me for Johnie Ged's⁵ Hole now,"
Quoth I, "if that thae news be true!
His braw calf-ward whare gowans grew,
Sae white and bonie,
Nae doubt they'll rive it wi' the plew;
They'll ruin Johnie!"

The creature grain'd an eldritch laugh,
And says "Ye needna yoke the pleugh,
Kirkyards will soon be till'd eneugh,
Tak ye nae fear:
They'll be trench'd wi' mony a sheugh,
In twa-three year.

"Whare I kill'd ane, a fair strae–death,
By loss o' blood or want of breath
This night I'm free to tak my aith,
That Hornbook's skill
Has clad a score i' their last claith,
By drap an' pill.

"An honest wabster to his trade,
Whase wife's twa nieves were scarce weel–bred
Gat tippence–worth to mend her head,
When it was sair;
The wife slade cannie to her bed,
But ne'er spak mair.

"A country laird had ta'en the batts,
Or some curmurring in his guts,
His only son for Hornbook sets,
An' pays him well:
The lad, for twa guid gimmer–pets,
Was laird himsel'.

"A bonie lass–ye kend her name–
Some ill–brewn drink had hov'd her wame;
She trusts hersel', to hide the shame,
In Hornbook's care;
Horn sent her aff to her lang hame,
To hide it there.

[Footnote 5: The grave–digger. – R.B.]

"That's just a swatch o' Hornbook's way;
Thus goes he on from day to day,
Thus does he poison, kill, an' slay,
An's weel paid for't;
Yet stops me o' my lawfu' prey,
Wi' his damn'd dirt:

"But, hark! I'll tell you of a plot,
Tho' dinna ye be speakin o't;
I'll nail the self–conceited sot,
As dead's a herrin;
Neist time we meet, I'll wad a groat,
He gets his fairin!"

But just as he began to tell,
The auld kirk–hammer strak the bell
Some wee short hour ayont the twal',
Which rais'd us baith:
I took the way that pleas'd mysel',
And sae did Death.

The Brigs Of Ayr

A Poem

Inscribed to John Ballantine, Esq., Ayr.

The simple Bard, rough at the rustic plough,
Learning his tuneful trade from ev'ry bough;
The chanting linnnet, or the mellow thrush,
Hailing the setting sun, sweet, in the green thorn bush;
The soaring lark, the perching red-breast shrill,
Or deep-ton'd plovers grey, wild-whistling o'er the hill;
Shall he-nurst in the peasant's lowly shed,
To hardy independence bravely bred,
By early poverty to hardship steel'd.
And train'd to arms in stern Misfortune's field—
Shall he be guilty of their hireling crimes,
The servile, mercenary Swiss of rhymes?
Or labour hard the panegyric close,
With all the venal soul of dedicating prose?
No! though his artless strains he rudely sings,
And throws his hand uncouthly o'er the strings,
He glows with all the spirit of the Bard,
Fame, honest fame, his great, his dear reward.
Still, if some patron's gen'rous care he trace,
Skill'd in the secret, to bestow with grace;
When Ballantine befriends his humble name,
And hands the rustic stranger up to fame,
With heartfelt throes his grateful bosom swells,
The godlike bliss, to give, alone excels.

'Twas when the stacks get on their winter hap,
And thack and rape secure the toil-won crap;
Potatoe-bings are snugged up frae skaith
O' coming Winter's biting, frosty breath;
The bees, rejoicing o'er their summer toils,
Unnumber'd buds an' flow'rs' delicious spoils,
Seal'd up with frugal care in massive waxen piles,
Are doom'd by Man, that tyrant o'er the weak,
The death o' devils, smoor'd wi' brimstone reek:
The thundering guns are heard on ev'ry side,
The wounded coveys, reeling, scatter wide;
The feather'd field-mates, bound by Nature's tie,
Sires, mothers, children, in one carnage lie:
(What warm, poetic heart but inly bleeds,
And execrates man's savage, ruthless deeds!)

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Nae mair the flow'r in field or meadow springs,
Nae mair the grove with airy concert rings,
Except perhaps the Robin's whistling glee,
Proud o' the height o' some bit half-lang tree:
The hoary morns precede the sunny days,
Mild, calm, serene, wide spreads the noontide blaze,
While thick the gosamour waves wanton in the rays.

'Twas in that season, when a simple Bard,
Unknown and poor—simplicity's reward!—
Ae night, within the ancient brugh of Ayr,
By whim inspir'd, or haply prest wi' care,
He left his bed, and took his wayward route,
And down by Simpson's¹ wheel'd the left about:
(Whether impell'd by all-directing Fate,
To witness what I after shall narrate;
Or whether, rapt in meditation high,
He wander'd out, he knew not where or why:)
The drowsy Dungeon-clock² had number'd two,
and Wallace Tower² had sworn the fact was true:
The tide—swoln firth, with sullen—sounding roar,
Through the still night dash'd hoarse along the shore.
All else was hush'd as Nature's closed e'e;
The silent moon shone high o'er tower and tree;
The chilly frost, beneath the silver beam,
Crept, gently—crusting, o'er the glittering stream—
When, lo! on either hand the list'ning Bard,
The clanging sugh of whistling wings is heard;
Two dusky forms dart through the midnight air;
Swift as the gos³ drives on the wheeling hare;
Ane on th' Auld Brig his airy shape uprears,
The other flutters o'er the rising piers:
Our warlock Rhymer instantly dexcried
The Sprites that owre the Brigs of Ayr preside.
(That Bards are second-sighted is nae joke,
And ken the lingo of the sp'ritual folk;
Fays, Spunkies, Kelpies, a', they can explain them,
And even the very deils they brawly ken them).
Auld Brig appear'd of ancient Pictish race,
The very wrinkles Gothic in his face;
He seem'd as he wi' Time had warstl'd lang,
Yet, teughly doure, he bade an unco bang.

[Footnote 1: A noted tavern at the Auld Brig end.—R. B.]

[Footnote 2: The two steeples.—R. B.]

[Footnote 3: The Gos—hawk, or Falcon.—R. B.]

New Brig was buskit in a braw new coat,
That he, at Lon'on, frae ane Adams got;

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In 's hand five taper staves as smooth 's a bead,
Wi' virls and whirlygigums at the head.
The Goth was stalking round with anxious search,
Spying the time-worn flaws in every arch;
It chanc'd his new-come neibor took his e'e,
And e'en a vexed and angry heart had he!
Wi' thieveless sneer to see his modish mien,
He, down the water, gies him this guid-e'en:-

Auld Brig

"I doubt na, frien', ye'll think ye're nae sheepshank,
Ance ye were streekit owre frae bank to bank!
But gin ye be a brig as auld as me-
Tho' faith, that date, I doubt, ye'll never see-
There'll be, if that day come, I'll wad a boddle,
Some fewer whigmaleeries in your noddle."

New Brig

"Auld Vandal! ye but show your little mense,
Just much about it wi' your scanty sense:
Will your poor, narrow foot-path of a street,
Where twa wheel-barrows tremble when they meet,
Your ruin'd, formless bulk o' stane and lime,
Compare wi' bonie brigs o' modern time?
There's men of taste wou'd tak the Ducat stream,⁴
Tho' they should cast the very sark and swim,
E'er they would grate their feelings wi' the view
O' sic an ugly, Gothic hulk as you."

Auld Brig

"Conceited gowk! puff'd up wi' windy pride!
This mony a year I've stood the flood an' tide;
And tho' wi' crazy eild I'm sair forfairn,
I'll be a brig when ye're a shapeless cairn!
As yet ye little ken about the matter,
But twa-three winters will inform ye better.
When heavy, dark, continued, a'-day rains,

[Footnote 4: A noted ford, just above the Auld Brig.-R. B.]

Wi' deepening deluges o'erflow the plains;
When from the hills where springs the brawling Coil,
Or stately Lugar's mossy fountains boil;
Or where the Greenock winds his moorland course.
Or haunted Garpal draws his feeble source,
Aroused by blustering winds an' spotting thowes,
In mony a torrent down the snaw-broo rowes;
While crashing ice, borne on the rolling spate,

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Sweeps dams, an' mills, an' brigs, a' to the gate;
And from Glenbuck,⁵ down to the Ratton-key,⁶
Auld Ayr is just one lengthen'd, tumbling sea—
Then down ye'll hurl, (deil nor ye never rise!)
And dash the gumlie jaups up to the pouring skies!
A lesson sadly teaching, to your cost,
That Architecture's noble art is lost!"

New Brig

"Fine architecture, trowth, I needs must say't o't,
The Lord be thankit that we've tint the gate o't!
Gaunt, ghastly, ghaist—alluring edifices,
Hanging with threat'ning jut, like precipices;
O'er-arching, mouldy, gloom—inspiring coves,
Supporting roofs, fantastic, stony groves;
Windows and doors in nameless sculptures drest
With order, symmetry, or taste unblest;
Forms like some bedlam Statuary's dream,
The craz'd creations of misguided whim;
Forms might be worshipp'd on the bended knee,
And still the second dread command be free;
Their likeness is not found on earth, in air, or sea!
Mansions that would disgrace the building taste
Of any mason reptile, bird or beast:
Fit only for a doited monkish race,
Or frosty maids forsworn the dear embrace,
Or cuifs of later times, wha held the notion,
That sullen gloom was sterling, true devotion:
Fancies that our guid Brugh denies protection,
And soon may they expire, unblest wi' resurrection!"

[Footnote 5: The source of the River Ayr.—R. B.]

[Footnote 6: A small landing place above the large quay.—R. B.]

Auld Brig

"O ye, my dear—remember'd, ancient yealings,
Were ye but here to share my wounded feelings!
Ye worthy Proveses, an' mony a Bailie,
Wha in the paths o' righteousness did toil aye;
Ye dainty Deacons, and ye douce Conveners,
To whom our moderns are but causey—cleaners
Ye godly Councils, wha hae blest this town;
ye godly Brethren o' the sacred gown,
Wha meekly gie your hurdies to the smiters;
And (what would now be strange), ye godly Writers;
A' ye douce folk I've borne aboon the broo,
Were ye but here, what would ye say or do?
How would your spirits groan in deep vexation,

Tam O' Shanter and Other Poems

To see each melancholy alteration;
And, agonising, curse the time and place
When ye begat the base degen'rate race!
Nae langer rev'rend men, their country's glory,
In plain braid Scots hold forth a plain braid story;
Nae langer thrifty citizens, an' douce,
Meet owre a pint, or in the Council-house;
But staumrel, corky-headed, graceless Gentry,
The herryment and ruin of the country;
Men, three-parts made by tailors and by barbers,
Wha waste your weel-hain'd gear on damn'd new brigs and harbours!"

New Brig

"Now haud you there! for faith ye've said enough,
And muckle mair than ye can mak to through.
As for your Priesthood, I shall say but little,
Corbies and Clergy are a shot right kittle:
But, under favour o' your langer beard,
Abuse o' Magistrates might weel be spar'd;
To liken them to your auld-warld squad,
I must needs say, comparisons are odd.
In Ayr, wag-wits nae mair can hae a handle
To mouth 'a Citizen,' a term o' scandal;
Nae mair the Council waddles down the street,
In all the pomp of ignorant conceit;
Men wha grew wise priggin owre hops and raisins,
Or gather'd lib'ral views in Bonds and Seisins:
If haply Knowledge, on a random tramp,
Had shor'd them with a glimmer of his lamp,
And would to Common-sense for once betray'd them,
Plain, dull Stupidity stept kindly in to aid them."

What farther clish-ma-claver aight been said,
What bloody wars, if Sprites had blood to shed,
No man can tell; but, all before their sight,
A fairy train appear'd in order bright;
Adown the glittering stream they featly danc'd;
Bright to the moon their various dresses glanc'd:
They footed o'er the wat'ry glass so neat,
The infant ice scarce bent beneath their feet:
While arts of Minstrelsy among them rung,
And soul-ennobling Bards heroic ditties sung.

O had M'Lauchlan,⁷ thairm-inspiring sage,
Been there to hear this heavenly band engage,
When thro' his dear strathspeys they bore with Highland rage;
Or when they struck old Scotia's melting airs,
The lover's raptured joys or bleeding cares;
How would his Highland lug been nobler fir'd,
And ev'n his matchless hand with finer touch inspir'd!

Tam O' Shanter and Other Poems

No guess could tell what instrument appear'd,
But all the soul of Music's self was heard;
Harmonious concert rung in every part,
While simple melody pour'd moving on the heart.
The Genius of the Stream in front appears,
A venerable Chief advanc'd in years;
His hoary head with water-lilies crown'd,
His manly leg with garter-tangle bound.
Next came the loveliest pair in all the ring,
Sweet female Beauty hand in hand with Spring;
Then, crown'd with flow'ry hay, came Rural Joy,
And Summer, with his fervid-beaming eye;

[Footnote 7: A well-known performer of Scottish music on the violin.—R. B.]

All-cheering Plenty, with her flowing horn,
Led yellow Autumn wreath'd with nodding corn;
Then Winter's time-bleach'd locks did hoary show,
By Hospitality with cloudless brow:
Next followed Courage with his martial stride,
From where the Feal wild-woody coverts hide;⁸
Benevolence, with mild, benignant air,
A female form, came from the tow'rs of Stair;⁹
Learning and Worth in equal measures trode,
From simple Catrine, their long-lov'd abode:¹⁰
Last, white-rob'd Peace, crown'd with a hazel wreath,
To rustic Agriculture did bequeath
The broken, iron instruments of death:
At sight of whom our Sprites forgat their kindling wrath.

Fragment Of Song

The night was still, and o'er the hill
The moon shone on the castle wa';
The mavis sang, while dew-drops hang
Around her on the castle wa';
Sae merrily they danced the ring
Frae eenin' till the cock did craw;
And aye the o'erword o' the spring
Was "Irvine's bairns are bonie a'."
Epigram On Rough Roads
I'm now arrived—thanks to the gods!—
Thro' pathways rough and muddy,
A certain sign that makin roads
Is no this people's study:
Altho' Im not wi' Scripture cram'd,
I'm sure the Bible says
That heedless sinners shall be damn'd,
Unless they mend their ways.

[Footnote 8: A compliment to the Montgomeries of Coilsfield, on the Feal or Faile, a tributary of the Ayr.]

[Footnote 9: Mrs. Stewart of Stair, an early patroness of the poet.]

[Footnote 10: The house of Professor Dugald Stewart.]

A Vision

As I stood by yon roofless tower,
Where the wa'flower scents the dewy air,
Where the howlet mourns in her ivy bower,
And tells the midnight moon her care.

The winds were laid, the air was still,
The stars they shot along the sky;
The fox was howling on the hill,
And the distant echoing glens reply.

The stream, adown its hazelly path,
Was rushing by the ruin'd wa's,
Hasting to join the sweeping Nith,
Whase distant roaring swells and fa's.

The cauld blae North was streaming forth
Her lights, wi' hissing, eerie din;
Athwart the lift they start and shift,
Like Fortune's favors, tint as win.

By heedless chance I turn'd mine eyes,
And, by the moonbeam, shook to see
A stern and stalwart ghaist arise,
Attir'd as Minstrels wont to be.

Had I a statue been o' stane,
His daring look had daunted me;
And on his bonnet grav'd was plain,
The sacred posy—"Libertie!"

And frae his harp sic strains did flow,
Might rous'd the slumb'ring Dead to hear;
But oh, it was a tale of woe,
As ever met a Briton's ear!

He sang wi' joy his former day,
He, weeping, wailed his latter times;
But what he said—it was nae play,
I winna venture't in my rhymes.

Tam O' Shanter and Other Poems

By some auld, houlet–haunted biggin,
Or kirk deserted by its riggin,
It's ten to ane ye'll find him snug in
Some eldritch part,
Wi' deils, they say, Lord save's! colleaguin
At some black art.

Ilk ghaist that haunts auld ha' or chaumer,
Ye gipsy–gang that deal in glamour,
And you, deep–read in hell's black grammar,
Warlocks and witches,
Ye'll quake at his conjuring hammer,
Ye midnight bitches.

It's tauld he was a sodger bred,
And ane wad rather fa'n than fled;
But now he's quat the spurtle–blade,
And dog–skin wallet,
And taen the–Antiquarian trade,
I think they call it.

He has a fouth o' auld nick–nackets:
Rusty airn caps and jinglin jackets,
Wad haud the Lothians three in tackets,
A towmont gude;
And parritch–pats and auld saut–backets,
Before the Flood.

Of Eve's first fire he has a cinder;
Auld Tubalcain's fire–shool and fender;
That which distinguished the gender
O' Balaam's ass:
A broomstick o' the witch of Endor,
Weel shod wi' brass.

Forbye, he'll shape you aff fu' gleg
The cut of Adam's philibeg;
The knife that nickit Abel's craig
He'll prove you fully,
It was a faulding jocteleg,
Or lang–kail gullie.

But wad ye see him in his glee,
For meikle glee and fun has he,
Then set him down, and twa or three
Gude fellows wi' him:
And port, O port! shine thou a wee,
And Then ye'll see him!

Now, by the Pow'rs o' verse and prose!

Thou art a dainty chield, O Grose!—
Whae'er o' thee shall ill suppose,
They sair misca' thee;
I'd take the rascal by the nose,
Wad say, "Shame fa' thee!"

Address Of Beelzebub

To the Right Honourable the Earl of Breadalbane, President of the Right Honourable and Honourable the Highland Society, which met on the 23rd of May last at the Shakespeare, Covent Garden, to concert ways and means to frustrate the designs of five hundred Highlanders, who, as the Society were informed by Mr. M'Kenzie of Applecross, were so audacious as to attempt an escape from their lawful lords and masters whose property they were, by emigrating from the lands of Mr. Macdonald of Glengary to the wilds of Canada, in search of that fantastic thing—Liberty.

Long life, my Lord, an' health be yours,
Unskaited by hunger'd Highland boors;
Lord grant me nae duddie, desperate beggar,
Wi' dirk, claymore, and rusty trigger,
May twin auld Scotland o' a life
She likes—as butchers like a knife.

Faith you and Applecross were right
To keep the Highland hounds in sight:
I doubt na! they wad bid nae better,
Than let them ance out owre the water,
Then up among thae lakes and seas,
They'll mak what rules and laws they please:
Some daring Hancocke, or a Franklin,
May set their Highland bluid a—ranklin;

Tam O' Shanter and Other Poems

Some Washington again may head them,
Or some Montgomery, fearless, lead them,
Till God knows what may be effected
When by such heads and hearts directed,
Poor dunghill sons of dirt and mire
May to Patrician rights aspire!
Nae sage North now, nor sager Sackville,
To watch and premier o'er the pack vile, –
An' whare will ye get Howes and Clintons
To bring them to a right repentance–
To cowe the rebel generation,
An' save the honour o' the nation?
They, an' be d–d! what right hae they
To meat, or sleep, or light o' day?
Far less–to riches, pow'r, or freedom,
But what your lordship likes to gie them?

But hear, my lord! Glengarry, hear!
Your hand's owre light to them, I fear;
Your factors, grieves, trustees, and bailies,
I canna say but they do gaylies;
They lay aside a' tender mercies,
An' tirl the hallions to the birses;
Yet while they're only poind't and herriet,
They'll keep their stubborn Highland spirit:
But smash them! crash them a' to spails,

An' rot the dyvors i' the jails!
The young dogs, swinge them to the labour;
Let wark an' hunger mak them sober!
The hizzies, if they're aughtlins fawsont,
Let them in Drury-lane be lesson'd!
An' if the wives an' dirty brats
Come thiggin at your doors an' yetts,
Flaffin wi' duds, an' grey wi' beas',
Frightin away your ducks an' geese;
Get out a horsewhip or a jowler,
The langest thong, the fiercest growler,
An' gar the tatter'd gypsies pack
Wi' a' their bastards on their back!
Go on, my Lord! I lang to meet you,
An' in my house at hame to greet you;
Wi' common lords ye shanna mingle,
The benmost neuk beside the ingle,
At my right han' assigned your seat,
'Tween Herod's hip an' Polycrate:
Or if you on your station tarrow,
Between Almagro and Pizarro,
A seat, I'm sure ye're well deservin't;
An' till ye come—your humble servant,

Beelzebub.

June 1st, Anno Mundi, 5790.