

Hughie Graham

This is an old ballad that the Bard chose to rewrite, adding several lines of his own, as well as including the name of a prominent Ayrshire family.

Our Lords are to the mountains gane,
A hunting o' the fallow deer;
And they hae gripet Hughie Graham
For stealing o' the bishop's mare.

And they hae tied him hand and foot,
And led him up thro' Stirling town;
The lads and lasses met him there,
Cried, 'Hughie Graham thou art a loun.'

'O lowse my right hand free,' he says,
'And put my braid sword in the same;
He's no' in Stirling town this day,
Daur tell the tale to Hughie Graham.'

Up then bespake the brave Whitefoord,
As he sat by the bishop's knee;
'Five hundred white stots I'll gie you,
If ye'll let Hughie Graham gae free'.

'O haud your tongue, the bishop says,
And wi' your pleading let me be;
For tho' ten Gramams were in his coat,
Hughie Graham this day shall die.'

Up then bespake the fair Whitefoord,
As she sat by the bishop's knee;
'Five hundred white pence I'll gie you
If ye'll gie Hughie Graham to me.'

Hughie Graham has been arrested and
charged with the theft of the bishop's
mare.

gripet = arrested

The crowds have yelled abuse at Hughie
Graham as he is led through the streets.

oun = fool

If his bonds were cut he would challenge
anyone who miscalled him, if they dared.

owse = release; *braid* = broad; *daur* = dare

A friend offered the bishop five-hundred
head of cattle to secure Hughie's release.

stots = bullocks

The bishop tells him to be silent and
states that Hughie must die.

The friend's wife then offers a large sum of
money to the bishop for Hughie's
freedom.

'O haud your tongue now lady fair,
And wi' your pleading let me be;
Altho ten Grahams were in his coat,
It's for my honour he must die.'

They've taen him to the gallows knowe,
He looked to the gallows tree,
Yet never colour left his cheek,
Nor ever did he blin' his e'e.

At length he looked round about,
To see whatever he could spy;
And there he saw his auld father,
And he was weeping bitterly.

'O haud your tongue, my father dear,
And wi' your weeping let it be;
Thy weeping's sair upon my heart,
Than a' that they can do to me.'

And ye may gie my brother John
My sword that's bent in the middle clear,
And let him come at twelve o' clock
And see me pay the bishop's mare.

'And ye may gie my brother James
My sword that's bent in the middle brown;
And bid him come at four o' clock,
And see his brother Hugh cut down.'

'Remember me to Maggy my wife,
The niest time ye gang o'er the moor;
Tell her, she staw the bishop's mare,
Tell her, she was the bishop's whore.'

'And ye may tell my kith and kin,
I never did disgrace their blood;
And when they meet the bishop's cloak,
To mak it shorter by the hood.'

The bishop tells her to be silent and states
that Hughie must die

Hughie is unflinching as he is led to the
gallows.

Looking around, he sees his father
weeping.

The father is told that his weeping is
harder to bear than any punishment.

sair = sore

One brother is to bring his unused sword
with him to witness the hanging.

The other brother, however, is to fetch the
one which is stained with blood to cut
him down.

Hughie then tells his father that it was his
wife who stole the mare, and that she was
the bishop's mistress.

niest = next; *staw* = stole

Assure his kinsmen that he was an honest
man, but should the opportunity arise,
they should remove the bishop's head with
their sword.

Thou Gloomy December

This poem shows how Burns was becoming depressed as the departure date for his beloved Clarinda, or Nancy, approached.

Ance mair I hail thee, thou gloomy December! *hail* = shout at
Ance mair I hail thee, wi' sorrow and care!
Sad was the parting thou makes me remember:
Parting wi' Nancy, Oh, ne'er to meet mair! *mair* = more

Fond lovers' parting is sweet, painful pleasure,
Hope beaming mild on the soft parting hour;
But the dire feeling, O farewell forever!
Anguish unmingled and agony pure!

Wild as the winter now tearing the forest,
Till the last leaf o' the summer is flown—
Such is the tempest has shaken my bosom,
Till my last hope and last comfort is gone!

Still as I hail thee, thou gloomy December,
Still shall I hail thee wi' sorrow and care;
For sad was the parting thou makes me remember;
Parting wi' Nancy, O, ne'er to meet mair!

Ae Fond Kiss

This, one of the most beautiful songs to be written by Robert Burns, as well as one of the saddest, tells of his heartache when his beloved Nancy McLehose, more famously known as Clarinda, finally set sail for the West Indies in an attempt to retrieve her marriage. This song will live forever.

Ae fond kiss, and then we sever!
Ae fareweel, and then forever,
Deep in heart-wrung tears I'll pledge thee,
Warring sighs and groans I'll wage thee.
Who shall say that Fortune grieves him,
While the star of hope she leaves him?
Me, nae cheerfu' twinkle lights me,
Dark, despair around benights me.

sever = separate; *wage* = pledge; *benights* = clouds with disappointment; *ae* = one

I'll ne'er blame my partial fancy:
Naething could resist my Nancy!
But to see her was to love her.
Love but her, and love for ever.
Had we never lov'd sae kindly,
Had we never lov'd sae blindly,
Never met – or never parted—
We had ne'er been broken-hearted.

naething = nothing

sae = so

Fare-thee-weel, thou first and fairest!
Fare-thee-weel, thou best and dearest!
Thine be ilka joy and treasure,
Peace, Enjoyment, Love, and Pleasure!
Ae fond kiss, and then we sever!
Ae fareweel, alas, for ever!
Deep in heart-wrung tears I'll pledge thee,
Warring sighs and groans I'll wage thee.

fare-thee-weel = farewell

ilka = every

Bonie Wee Thing

As we read the many beautiful poems and songs that Burns composed over the years, we must marvel at his ability to use his verse as a means of flattering whichever young woman had caught his eye. This particular song was dedicated to a lass by the name of Deborah Duff Davies, who was also the recipient of several letters from the Bard. Although I have no idea whether or not Burns was successful in his pursuit of Miss Davies, I do know that this song has become one of his best-loved works, and expect that it will remain so for many years to come.

Bonie wee thing, cannie wee thing,
Lovely wee thing, wert thou mine,
I wad wear thee in my bosom
Lest my jewel I should tine.

bonie = beautiful; *cannie* = gentle,
wad = would; *tine* = lose

Wistfully I look and languish,
In that bonie face o' thine
And my heart it stounds with anguish.
Lest my wee thing na be mine.

stounds = pains; *na* = not

Wit and Grace and Love and Beauty,
In ae constellation shine;
To adore thee is my duty,
Goddess o' this soul o' mine.

ae = one

Geordie – An Old Ballad

Another old ballad collected by the Bard. There is some doubt as to whether or not he revised it as he normally would do with such songs, or if this remains the original version. The verses are believed to relate to George Gordon, 4th Earl of Huntly, who was imprisoned in Edinburgh Castle in 1554, although another school of thought considers the 6th Earl to be a more likely candidate. Whatever, it remains a stirring tale that illustrates how justice was dispensed in a summary manner during that period in history.

There was a battle in the north,
And nobles there was many,
And they hae kill'd Sir Charles Hay,
And they laid the wyte on Geordie.

O, he has written a lang letter,
He sent it to his lady;
Ye maun cum up to Enbrugh town
To see what words o' Geordie.

When first she look'd the letter on,
She was baith red and rosy;
But she had na read a word but twa,
Till she wallow't like a lily.

'Gar get to me my gude grey steed,
My menzie a' gae wi' me;
For I shall neither eat nor drink
Till Enbrugh town shall see me.'

And she has mountit her gude grey steed,
Her menzie a' gaed wi' her;
And she did neither eat nor drink
Till Enbrugh town did see her.

Geordie has been blamed for the murder of
another nobleman, Sir Charles Hay.

wyte = blame

He's written a letter to his wife telling her
that she must come to Edinburgh to see
what has befallen him.

maun cum = must come; *Enbrugh* = Edinburgh

Her colour changed when she read the
letter and she went deathly pale.

wallow't = wilted

Her retinue were commanded to
accompany her to Edinburgh.

gude = good; *menzie* = retinue, armed
followers

She got on her horse and left for
Edinburgh with her retinue. She didn't eat
or drink until she arrived in the city.

And first appear'd the fatal block,
And syne the aix to head him;
And Geordie cumin down the stair,
And bands o' airn upon him.

But tho' he was chain'd in fetters strang,
O' airn and steel sae heavy,
There was na ane in a' the court,
Sae braw a man as Geordie.

O, she's down on her bended knee,
I wat she's pale and weary,
'O pardon, pardon, noble king,
And gie me back my Dearie!

I hae born seven sons to my Geordie dear,
The seventh ne'er saw his daddie:
O pardon, pardon, noble king,
Pity a waefu' lady!

'Gar bid the headin-man mak haste!'
Our king replied fu lordly:
'O noble king, tak a' that's mine,
But gie me back my Geordie.'

The Gordons cam and the Gordons ran,
And they were stark and steady;
And ay the word amang them a'
Was, 'Gordons keep you ready.'

An aged lord at the king's right hand
Says, 'Noble king, but hear me:
Gar her tell down five thousand pound,
And gie her back her Dearie.'

The block and axe were produced and
Geordie appeared, held in chains.
syne = then; *aix* = axe; *airn* = iron

Even although he was chained up, there
was no better man in court than Geordie
fetters = shackles

His wife pleads with the king to spare
him.
wat = pledge

She has borne seven sons to Geordie, but
the youngest has not yet seen his father.
She begs for pardon.
waefu' = woeful

The pleas fell on deaf ears as the king told the
executioner to proceed. The wife then offered
all her worldly goods for Geordies' release.
headin-man = executioner; *gar* = make/compel

Meanwhile, the Gordon clan were
preparing themselves to do battle for their
chief.
stark = strong; *ay* = all

However, another member of the court
suggested to the king that a ransom might
be more appropriate.

Some gae her marks, some gae her crowns,
 Some gae her dollars many;
 And she's tell'd down five thousand pound,
 And she's gotten again her Dearie.

She blinkit blythe in Geordie's face,
 Says, 'Dear I've bought thee, Geordie:
 But there sud been bluidy bouks on the green,
 Or I had tint my laddie.'

He claspit her by the middle sma',
 And he kist her lips sae rosy:
 'The sweetest flower o' woman-kind
 Is my sweet, bonie Lady!'

The clan made up the ransom with
 currency from all over the world, and
 Geordie gained his release.

She smiled brightly at him and told him
 that she had paid dearly for his life, but if
 she had lost him, bodies would be lying on
 the green.

sud = should; *bouks* = torsos; *tint* = lo

He clasped her by her small waist and
 kissed her, calling her the sweetest flower
 of all woman kind.

Bessy and her Spinnin'-Wheel

Here we have a poem dedicated to the pleasant simplicity of rural life, and describing the pastoral scenes enjoyed daily by the country woman as she works at her spinning-wheel. The lusciousness of nature, described in both this work and the *Elegy on Capt Matthew Henderson*, emphasises only too clearly the effects of industrial developments upon the countryside which Robert Burns loved so dearly

O, leeze me on my spinnin'-wheel!
And leeze me on my rock and reel,
Frae tap to tae that cleeds me bien,
And haps me fiel and warm at é'en!
I'll set me down and sing and spin,
While laigh descends the summer sun,
Blest wi' content, and milk and meal—
O, leeze me on my spinnin'-wheel!

On ilka hand the burnies trot,
And meet below my theekit cot,
The scented birk and hawthorn white
Across the pool their arms unite,
Alike to screen the birdie's nest,
And little fishes caller rest.
The sun blinks kindly in the biel,
Where blythe I turn my spinnin'-wheel.

On lofty aiks the cushats wail,
And Echo cons the doolfu' tale,
The lintwhites in the hazel braes,
Delighted, rival ither's lays.
The craik amang the claver hay,
The paitrick whirrin' o'er the ley,
The swallow jinkin' round my shiel,
Amuse me at my spinnin'-wheel.

Bessy is blessing the good fortune that allows her to be well clothed and well fed at all times.

leeze = blessings; *rock* = distaff; *cleeds* = clothes; *bien* = well; *haps me fiel* = covers me well; *laigh* = low

This verse describes the thatched cottage and the views enjoyed by Bessy,

ilka = each; *burnies* = streams; *theekit cot* = thatched cottage; *birk* = birch; *caller* = cool; *biel* = shelter

This time it is the bird-life surrounding the cottage that is described in detail.

aiks = oaks; *cushats* = pigeons; *lintwhites* = linnets; *lays* = songs; *craik* = corncrake; *claver* = clover; *paitrick* = partridge; *ley* = meadow; *jinkin'* = darting; *shiel* = hut; *cons* = returns

Wi' sma' to sell and less to buy,
Aboon distress, below envy,
O, wha wad leave this humble state
For a' the pride of a' the great?
Amid their flarin', idle toys,
Amid their cumbrous, dinsome joys,
Can they the peace and pleasure feel
Of Bessy at her spinnin'-wheel?

Bessy may live humbly but has no envy of
the wealthy with their life of rowdy
pleasures. Nothing can compare with the
simple life which she enjoys and the peace
which surrounds her.

Country Lassie

Whether to marry for love or to marry for money was always a favourite subject of the Bard's. This poem, written in 1794, follows that theme and Burns as ever takes the side of love.

In simmer, when the hay was mawn,
And corn wav'd green in ilka field,
While claver blooms white o'er the ley,
And roses blaw in ilka bield;
Blythe Bessie, in the milkin-shiel,
Says, 'I'll be wed come o't what will;
Outspak a dame in wrinkled eild,
'O' gude advisement comes nae ill.'

'It's ye hae wooers mony ane,
And lassie ye're but young ye ken;
Then wait a wee and cannie wale,
A routhie butt, a routhie ben:
There's Johnnie o' the Buskieglen,
Fu' is his barn, fu' is his byre;
Tak this frae me my bonie hen,
It's plenty beets the luv'er's fire.'

'For Johnnie o' the Buskieglen,
I dinna care a single flie;
He lo'es sae weel his craps and kye,
He has nae loove to spare for me:
But blythes the blink o' Robie's e'e,
And weel I wat he lo'es me dear;
Ae blink o' him I wadna gie
For Buskieglen and a' his gear.'

Young Bessie was in the milking-shed when she announced that she intended to be married soon, come what may. An old lady advised her to consider the merits of marrying a wealthy suitor.

simmer = summer; *mawn* = mown; *claver* = clover; *ilka bield* = every field; *shiel* = shed; *eild* = old-age

She points out that Bessie will have many wooers and is still young, and that a well-stocked household can be preferable to love. *mony ane* = many-a-one; *wait a wee* = wait a short while; *cannie wale* = carefully select; *routhie* = plentiful; *butt* = kitchen; *ben* = parlour/best room; *byre* = cattle-shed; *beets* = fans; *luer's fire* = passion

But Bessie thinks that Johnnie is too fond of his farm and would ignore her, whereas Robie is another matter altogether. *craps* = crops; *kye* = cattle; *blithe* = merry; *wat* = know; *gear* = wealth; *faught* = struggle; *fechtin* = fighting

'O thoughtless lassie, life's a faught,
 The canniest gate, the strife is sair;
 But ay fu'han't is fechtin best,
 A hungry care's an unco care;
 But some will spend, and some will care
 An' wilfu' folk maun hae their will;
 Syne as ye brew, my maiden fair,
 Keep mind that ye maun drink the yill.'

'O gear will buy me rigs o' land,
 And gear will buy me sheep and kye;
 But the tender heart o' leesome loove,
 The gowd and siller canna buy:
 We may be poor, Robie and I,
 Light is the burden loove lays on;
 Content and loove brings peace and joy:
 What mair hae queens upon a throne?'

The old lady states that life is a battle in which one is better to be well-armed and whatever the girl decides is what she will have to live with.

faught = fight; *canniest gate* = most careful path; *fu'-han't* = full-handed; *maun* = must; *craps* = crops; *kye* = cows; *wat* = promise'

Bessie knows that money can keep a farm well-stocked, but it cannot buy the love that she and Robie will share.

rigs = ridges of land; *leesome* = tender; *gowd* = gold; *siller* = silver; *loove* = love

Willie Wastle

SIC A WIFE AS WILLIE'S WIFE

The name Willie Wastle was derived from a children's game similar to 'I'm the King of the Castle'. It is written in *grotesquerie*, a style which was popular in Scotland.

Willie Wastle dwalls on Tweed,
The spot they ca' it Linkumdoddie;
A creeshie wabster till his trade,
Can steal a clue wi' ony body:
He has a wife that's dour and din,
Tinkler Madgie was her mither;
Sic a wife as Willie's wife,
I wad na gie a button for her.—

She has an é'e, she has but ane,
Our cat has twa, the very colour;
Five rusty teeth, forbye a stump,
A clapper-tongue wad deave a miller:
A whiskin beard about her mou,
Her nose and chin, they threaten ither;
Sic a wife as Willie's wife,
I wad na gie a button for her.—

She's bow-hough'd, she's hem-shin'd,
Ae limping leg a hand-bread shorter;
She's twisted right, she's twisted left,
To balance fair in ilka quarter:
She has a hump upon her breast,
The twin o' that upon her shouther;
Sic a wife as Willie's wife,
I wad na gie a button for her.—

Willie Wastle lives on the Tweed, in a place called Linkumdoddie. His trade is oily-weaving. His wife is sullen and noisy. *dwalls* = dwells; *creeshie wabster* = greasy weaver; *clue* = portion of cloth or yarn; *din* = dingy; *tinkler* = tinker; *wad na gie* = would not give

She has only one eye, which is like a cat's, five rotten teeth and a stump, with a beard and huge nose and chin. She talks enough to deafen a miller. *deave* = deafen; *mou* = mouth

She's bow legged and has shins shaped like horse shoes. One of her legs is shorter than the other. She's all twisted, with twin humps. *bow-hough'd* = bow-legged; *hem-shin'd* = the shape of a horse-collar; *shouther* = shoulder

Auld baudrans by the ingle sits,
 An' wi' her loof her face a-washin;
 But Willie's wife is na sae trig,
 She dights her grunzie wi' a hushian;
 Her waly nieves like midden-creels,
 Her feet wad fyle the Logan-water;
 Sic a wife as Willie's wife,
 I wad na gie a button for her.—

An old cat sits by the fire, washing her face
 with a paw. But Willie's wife isn't so clean,
 she wipes her nose with her old footless
 sock. Her fists are like manure buckets,
 and her feet stink.

auld baudrans = old cat; *loof* = paw; *trig* =
 tidy; *dights her grunzie* = wipes her snout;
hushian = old footless stocking; *waly nieves*
 = large fists; *midden-creels* = manure
 baskets; *fyle* = foul

Such a Parcel of Rogues in a Nation

In common with millions of others throughout the ages, Robert Burns was fervently proud of Scotland and all things Scottish. He despised the Act of Union in 1707 and considered that the thirty-one Scottish commissioners, who sold out to England in return for land and money, were no more than a parcel of rogues who had committed treason. His contempt for their actions is abundantly clear in the following verses.

Fareweel to a' our Scottish fame,
Fareweel our ancient glory!
Fareweel ev'n to the Scottish name,
Sae famed in martial story!
Now Sark rins o'er the Solway sands,
An' Tweed rins to the ocean,
To mark where England's province stands,
Such a parcel of rogues in a nation!

What force or guile could not subdue
Thro' many warlike ages
Is wrought now by a coward few
For hireling traitor's wages.
The English steel we could disdain,
Secure in valour's station;
But English gold has been our bane,
Such a parcel of rogues in a nation!

O, would, or I had seen the day
That Treason thus could sell us,
My auld grey head had lien in clay,
Wi' Bruce and loyal Wallace!
But pith and power, till my last hour,
I'll mak this declaration;
'We're bought and sold for English gold',
Such a parcel of rogues in a nation!

The Slave's Lament

Maya Angelou, the famous Afro-American poet and admirer of Robert Burns, expressed her astonishment that Burns had never been to Africa, yet had written this poem. She felt that this must have been written by someone with first-hand knowledge of slavery – someone who had suffered.

Although not a tied slave, Burns had certainly been a slave to the land and had toiled for many hours for little reward. He had a remarkable ability to highlight injustice, equalled by his ability to empathise with the lot of the persecuted.

It was in sweet Senegal that my foes did me enthrall, *enthrall* = enslave
For the lands of Virginia, - ginia O;
Torn from that lovely shore, and must never see it more,
And alas! I am weary, weary O!

All on that charming coast is no bitter snow or frost,
Like the lands of Virginia, - ginia O;
There streams for ever flow, and there flowers forever blow,
And alas! I am weary, weary O!

The burden I must bear, whilst the cruel scourge I fear,
In the lands of Virginia, - ginia O;
And I think on friends most dear, with the bitter, bitter tear,
And alas! I am weary, weary O!

The Deil's Awa Wi' Th' Exciseman

Burns was only too aware of the resentment felt towards himself and his fellow officers who made up the Excise force in Scotland, for at that time smuggling and the illegal distilling of whisky were regarded by the populace as good, honest enterprises. He entertained his fellow officers with this song at an Excise dinner in 1792.

CHORUS

*The Deil's awa, the Deil's awa,
The Deil's awa wi' th' Exciseman!
He's danc'd awa, he's danced awa,
He's danced awa wi' th' Exciseman!*

The Deil cam fiddlin' thro' the town,
And danced awa wi' th' Exciseman,
An ilka wife cries:— 'Auld Mahoun,
I wish you luck o' the prize man!'

'We'll mak our maut, and we'll brew our
drink,
We'll laugh, sing, and rejoice, man,
And monie braw thanks to the meikle
black Deil,
That danc'd awa wi' th' Exciseman.'

There's threesome reels, there's foursome
reels,
There's hornpipes and strathspeys, man,
But the ae best dance e'er cam to the land
Was *The Deil's awa wi' th' Exciseman*.

The townswomen are thanking the devil for
removing the exciseman, for now they can
get on with their home-brewing in peace.
Auld Mahoun = the devil

maut = malt; *monie braw thanks* = many
good thanks; *meikle* = great;

Highland Mary

Highland Mary, or Mary Campbell, has been the subject of many Burns researchers through the years. Although the Bard appears to have considered her a saintly being, others have portrayed her in a totally different manner.

Burns' affair with Mary Campbell started after his break-up with Jean Armour, and it certainly appears that he had intended to emigrate with her to the West Indies. However, this was not to be as she died suddenly of either fever, or premature childbirth at the age of twenty-three. No one knows for sure, but what is certain is that Burns was indeed smitten by Mary Campbell, and that his affection for her remained strong long after her untimely death, as this beautiful poem, written six years afterwards, fully illustrates.

Ye banks and braes and streams around, *braes = slopes; drumlie = muddy;*
The castle o' Montgomery, *unfauld = unfold*
Green be your woods, and fair your flowers,
Your waters never drumlie!
There Simmer first unfauld her robes,
And there the longest tarry!
For there I took the last fareweel,
O' my sweet Highland Mary!

How sweetly bloom'd the gay, green birk, *birk = birch*
How rich the hawthorn's blossom,
As underneath their fragrant shade,
I clasp'd her to my bosom!
The golden hours on angel wings
Flew o'er me and my dearie;
For dear to me as light and life
Was my sweet Highland Mary.

Wi' monie a vow and lock'd embrace
 Our parting was fu' tender;
 And pledging aft to meet again,
 We tore oursel's asunder.
 But O! fell Death's untimely frost,
 That nipt my flower sae early!
 Now green's the sod, and cauld's the clay,
 That wraps my Highland Mary!

wi' monie = with many; *nipt* = nipped;
cauld = cold

O, pale, pale now, those rosy lips
 I aft hae kissed sae fondly;
 And clos'd for ay, the sparkling glance
 That dwalt on me sae kindly;
 And mouldering now in silent dust
 That heart that lo'ed me dearly!
 But still within my bosom's core
 Shall live my Highland Mary.

The Rights of Woman

SPOKEN BY MISS FONTENELLE ON HER BENEFIT NIGHT

It is an indisputable fact that Burns was a lover of woman. His many documented affairs have earned him the reputation of being a true rake and opportunist who would happily seduce any pretty girl he met. We should note, however, that those with whom he had relationships were willing participants.

There is a side to Burns that is not so well recognised, and that is his strong support for the feminist movement. At a time when few men took women's place in society seriously, Burns felt that woman's rights were important, as the following illustrates.

While Europe's eye is fix'd on might things,
The fate of Empires and the fall of Kings;
While quacks of State must each produce his plan, *quacks* = mere talking pretenders
And even children lisp the Rights of Man;
Amid this mighty fuss, just let me mention,
The Rights of Woman merit some attention.

First, in the sexes' intermix'd connection,
One sacred Right of Woman is Protection.
The tender flower that lifts its head elate, *elate* = proudly
Helpless must fall before the blasts of Fate,
Sunk on the earth, defac'd its lovely form,
Unless your shelter ward th' impending storm.

Our second Right – but needless here is caution –
 To keep that right inviolate's the fashion;
 Each man of sense has it so full before him,
 He'd die before he'd wrong it – 'tis Decorum!
 There was, indeed, in far less polish'd days,
 A time, when rough, rude Man had naughty ways;
 Would swagger, swear, get drunk, kick up a riot,
 Nay, even thus invade a lady's quiet!
 Now, thank our stars! These Gothic times are fled; *gothic* = barbarous
 Now, well-bred men – (and you are well-bred) –
 Most justly think (and we are much the gainers) *gainers* = winners
 Such conduct neither spirit, wit nor manners.

For Right the third, our last, our best, our dearest
 That Right to fluttering Female hearts the nearest,
 Which even the Rights of Kings, in low prostration,
 Most humbly own – tis dear, dear Admiration!
 In that blest sphere alone we live and move;
 There taste that life of life – Immortal Love.
 Smiles, glances, sighs, tears, fits, flirtations, airs –
 'Gainst such an host what flinty savage dares? *flinty* = cruel
 When awful Beauty joins in all her charms,
 Who is so rash as rise in rebel arms?
 But truce with kings, and truce with Constitutions,
 With bloody armaments and Revolutions;
 Let Majesty your first attention summon
 Ah! *ça ira*! THE MAJESTY OF WOMAN ! *ca ira* = it will be (French
 revolutionary song)

The Lea-Rig

A delightful old Scottish ballad breathed upon by the Bard, and one which remains a popular choice at any function featuring the songs of Robert Burns.

When o'er the hill the eastern star,
Tells bughtin-time is near, my jo,
And owsen frae the furrow'd field,
Return sae dowf and weary, O,
Down by the burn, where scented birks,
Wi' dew are hanging clear, my jo,
I'll meet thee on the lea-rig,
My ain kind Dearie, O!

At midnight hour, in mirkest glen,
I'd rove, and ne'er be eerie, O,
If thro' that glen I gaed to thee,
My ain kind Dearie, O!
Altho' the night were ne'er sae wet,
And I were ne'er sae weary, O,
I'd meet thee on the lea-rig,
My ain kind Dearie, O!

The hunter lo'es the morning sun,
To rouse the mountain deer, my jo;
At noon the fisher takes the glen,
Along the burn to steer, my jo;
Gie me the hour o' gloamin' grey,
It makes my heart sae cheery, O,
To meet thee on the lea-rig,
My ain kind Dearie, O!

Evening descends as the sheep are returned to their folds, and the oxen trudge wearily homewards. The young man looks forward to meeting his sweetheart at a later hour.

bughtin-time = time to bring in the livestock;
jo = sweetheart; *owsen* = oxen; *furrow'd* =
ploughed; *sae dowf* = so dull; *birks* = birches;
lea-rig = grassy ridge; *ain* = own

Darkness holds no fears for him when he is travelling through the countryside to meet his lover. Even if it had never rained so much, or he'd never been so tired, he'd still go to meet them.

mirkest = gloomiest; *rove* = wander; *ne'er be*
eerie = never be frightened; *thro'* = through;
gaed = went; *sae* = so

The hunter may prefer the morning, and the angler midday, but for him the happiest time is when the sun is going down and he's meeting his sweetheart.

lo'es = loves; *gie* = give; *gloamin'* = dusk

The Tree of Liberty

Here we have another poem by Burns on one of his favourite topics – Liberty. This poem appears to have been inspired by the French Revolution, but the Bard's sympathies obviously lie toward the Jacobite cause.

Heard ye o' the Tree o' France
I watna what's the name o't,
Around it a' the patriots dance,
Weel Europe kens the fame o't.
It stands where ance the Bastile stood
A prison built by kings, man,
When superstition's hellish brood
Kept France in leading strings, man.

Upo' this tree there grows sic fruit,
Its virtues I can tell, man;
It raises man aboon the brute,
It maks him ken himsel, man!
Gif ance the peasant taste a a bit,
He's greater than a lord, man,
An' wi' the beggar shares a mit
O' a' he can afford, man.

This fruit is worth a' Afric's wealth,
To comfort us 'twas sent, man;
To gie the sweetest blush o' health,
An' mak us a' content, man;
It clears the een, it cheers the heart,
Mak's high and low gude friends, man;
And he wha acts the traitor's part
It to perdition sends, man.

By the use of the term the 'Tree of France', the Bard symbolises liberty and freedom. The storming of the infamous Bastille in Paris, and its subsequent use as a prison for the aristocracy before its destruction, marked the beginning of freedom for the oppressed peasants of France.

watna = don't know; *kens* = knows; *ance* = once; *leading strings* = reins

Freedom is a virtue that raises man above the beast. A peasant who tastes freedom will be better than a lord, for he has known poverty and oppression and will be more inclined to help those who have nothing.

upo' = upon; *sic* = such; *aboon* = above; *gif* = if; *ance* = once

Freedom is worth all the wealth to be found in Africa. A free man has clearness of vision, and with happiness in his heart can befriend people in all levels of society. Only ruination will come to those who oppose freedom.

perdition = hell

My blessings aye attend the chiel
 Wha pitied Gallia's slaves, man
 And staw a branch, spite o' the deil,
 Frae 'yont the western waves, man
 Fair Virtue water'd it wi' care,
 And now she sees wi' pride, man
 How weel it buds and blossoms there,
 Its branches spreading wide, man.

But vicious folk aye hate to see
 The works o' Virtue thrive, man;
 The courtly vermin's banned the tree,
 And grat to see it thrive, man!
 King Loui' thought to cut it down,
 When it was unco sma', man;
 For this the watchman cracked his crown,
 Cut off his head and a', man

A wicked crew syne on a time,
 Did tak a solemn aith, man,
 It ne'er should flourish to its prime,
 I wat they pledged their faith, man.
 Awa' they gaed wi' mock parade,
 Like beagles hunting game, man,
 But soon grew weary o' the trad
 And wished they'd been at hame ,man

For Freedom, standing by the tree,
 Her sons did loudly ca', man;
 She sang a song o' liberty,
 Which pleased them ane and a', man.
 By her inspired, the new-born race
 Soon drew the avenging steel, man;
 The hirelings ran – her foes gied chase,
 And banged the despot weel, man.

Burns blesses the person responsible for the start of the French Revolution, and casts his eye to America where the seeds of discontent concerning the slave trade are growing rapidly.

aye = always; *chiel* = young man; *Gallia* = France; *staw* = stole; *frae 'yont* = from beyond; *weel* = well

Not everyone is enthusiastic about the rights of man. The French ruling classes did their utmost to suppress the peasants when revolt threatened, but the ultimate result was that King Louis XVI was beheaded by the very people whom he'd persecuted.

grat = wept; *unco sma'* = very small

Supporters of the aristocracy attempted in desperation to fight back and reinstate the slave-like conditions to which the peasants had been subjected, but they soon realised that the battle was lost.

syne = once; *aith* = oath; *wat* = know; *gaed* = went; *hame* = home

Inspired by the stirring words of La Marseillaise, the peasant uprising saw the end of the despotic ruling classes throughout the whole of France.

ca' = call; *ane and a'* = one and all; *gied* = gave; *banged the despot weel* = struck a heavy blow against the tyrant

Let Britain boast her hardy oak,
 Her poplar and her pine, man!
 Auld Britain ance could crack her joke,
 And o'er her neighbours shine, man!
 But seek the forest round and round,
 And soon 'twill be agreed, man,
 That sic a tree can not be found,
 'Twixt London and the Tweed, man.

Without this tree, alake this life
 Is but a vale o' woe, man;
 A scene o' sorrow mixed wi' strife,
 Nae real joys we know, man.
 We labour soon, we labour late,
 To feed the titled knave, man;
 And a' the comfort we're to get
 Is that ayont the grave, man

Wi' plenty o' sic trees, I trow,
 The warld would live in peace, man;
 The sword would help to mak a plough,
 The din o' war wad cease, man;
 Like brethren in a common cause,
 We'd on each other smile, man;
 And equal rights and equal laws
 Wad gladden every isle, ma

Wae worth the loon wha wadna eat
 Sic halesome dainty cheer, man;
 I'd gie my shoon frae off my feet,
 To taste sic fruit, I swear, man.
 Syne let us pray, auld England may
 Sure plant this far-famed tree, man;
 And blythe we'll sing, and hail the day
 That gave us liberty, man.

The Bard points out that although many trees grow throughout Britain, there is no Tree of Liberty. Freedom no longer exists and the people are again no more than serfs.
auld = old; *ance* = once; *crack* = tell

Life without freedom is a joyless existence, where the working-man knows nothing but endless toil trying to meet the demands of his titled master. Only death will relieve him of his burden.
alake = alas; *ayont* = beyond

If all men were free with equal rights, then war would be a thing of the past. Weapons could be turned into ploughs and mankind could go forward together.
trow = believe; *warld* = world; *din* = noise; *sic* = such

What worth does the man have who wouldn't eat such wholesome cheer. Burns would give the shoes of his feet to see this happening. He prays for the day when Scotland will be free from the English yoke and Scotland can sing the song of liberty.

wae worth the loon = woe befall the rascal;
wha wadna = who would not; *shoon* = shoes; *frae aff* = from off; *blythe* = cheerfully

Once again we have yet another example of the Bard's amazing ability to flatter young women in verse. On this occasion the subject was Jessie Staig, the daughter of the Provost of Dumfries. She died in 1801 at the age of 26. Jessie must have been seventeen or eighteen when the song was written, and Burns recognised that although she was truly beautiful, she was also an extremely modest young lady.

True-hearted was he, the sad swain o' the Yarrow, *swain* = lover/suitor
And fair are the maids on the banks o' the Ayr,
But by the sweet side o' the Nith's winding river,
Are lovers as faithful, and maidens as fair;
To equal young Jessie seek Scotland all over;
To equal young Jessie you seek it in vain;
Grace, Beauty and Elegance fetter her lover,
And maidenly modesty fixes the chain.

Fresh is the rose in the gay, dewy morning,
And sweet is the lily at evening close;
But in the fair presence o' lovely young Jessie,
Unseen is the lily, unheeded the rose.
Love sits in her smile, a wizard ensnaring;
Enthron'd in her een he delivers his law;
And still to her charms she alone is a stranger!
Her modest demeanour's the jewel of a'.

On The Commemoration of Rodney's Victory

Admiral George Rodney fought a major battle against the French Navy in the West Indies on the 12th April, 1792. This resulted in Great Britain regaining control over the Atlantic, and the victory was the cause of celebration throughout the British Isles. Burns was sufficiently stirred by the event to pen the following tribute.

Instead of a song, boys, I'll give you a toast:
Here's to the mem'ry of those on the Twelfth that we lost!—
That we lost, did I say? nay, by Heav'n that we found!
For their fame it shall last while the world goes round.
The next in succession I'll give you The King!
And who would betray him, on high may he swing!
And here's the grand fabric, the Free Constitution,
As built on the base of our great Revolution!
And, longer with Politics not to be cramm'd,
Be Anarchy curs'd, and be Tyranny damn'd!
And who would to Liberty e'er prove disloyal,
May his son be a hangman, and he his first trial!

The Sodger's Return

WHEN WILD WAR'S DEADLY BLAST WAS BLAWN

Once more we have a bawdy old ballad revised by the Bard. This is the story of a soldier returning after years at war, and the welcome given to him by his lover.

When wild War's deadly blast was blawn,
And gentle Peace returning,
Wi' monie a sweet babe fatherless
And monie a widow mourning,
I left the lines and tented field,
Where lang I'd been a lodger,
My humble knapsack a' my wealth,
A poor and honest sodger.

A leal, light heart was in my breast,
My hand unstain'd wi' plunder,
And for fair Scotia, hame again,
I cheery on did wander:
I thought upon the banks o' Coil,
I thought upon my Nancy,
And ay I mind't the witching smile
That caught my youthful fancy.

At length I reached the bonie glen,
Where early life I sported.
I pass'd the mill and trysting thorn,
Where Nancy aft I courted.
Wha spied I but my ain dear maid,
Down by her mother's dwelling,
And turn'd me round to hide the flood
That in my een was swelling!

The long war has ended leaving many
children fatherless and women widowed,
and the soldier sets off home with nothing
but his knapsack.

monie = many; *sodger* = soldier

His mind was on his Nancy as he walked
the long road home in light-hearted mood.

leal = true

Eventually he arrived at the glen where he
had lived as a youngster, but became
emotional when he saw Nancy in the
distance.

trysting thorn = meeting place

Wi' alter'd voice, quoth I – 'Sweet lass,
Sweet as yon hawthorn's blossom,
O, happy, happy may he be,
That's dearest to thy bosom!
My purse is light, I've far to gang,
And fain wad be thy lodger;
I've served my king and country lang,
Take pity on a sodger.'

Sae wistfully she gaz'd on me,
And lovelier she than ever.
Quo she, 'A sodger ance I lo'ed,
Forget him shall I never:
Our humble cot, and hamely fare,
Ye freely shall partake it;
That gallant badge, the dear cockade,
Ye're welcome for the sake o't!'

She gaz'd, she redden'd like a rose,
Syne, pale like onie lily,
She sank within my arms and cried,
'Art thou my ain dear Willie?'
'By him who made yon sun and sky,
By whom true love's regarded,
I am the man, and thus may still
True lover's be rewarded!

'The wars are o'er, and I'm come hame,
And find thee still true-hearted.
Tho' poor in gear, we're rich in love,
And mair, we'se ne'er be parted'
Quo' she, 'my grandsire left me gowd,
A mailen plenish'd fairly!
And come, my faithfu' sodger lad,
Thou'rt welcome to it dearly!'

With husky voice he asked her if she
could find him accommodation as he had
travelled a distance and had little money.
fain wad be = would like to be

She looked at him sadly without
recognising him and told him that she had
loved a soldier, therefore he would be
welcome in her home.

ance = once; *cot* = cottage; *hamely fare* =
simple food; *cockade* = rosette worn as a
cap badge

Sudden recognition came to her and they
fell into each others arms.
syne = then

He assured that he was home for good, and
although they would have little money, they
would be rich in love. However her
grandfather had left her money and a well
stocked farm which she would share with
him.

gear = wealth; *grandsire* = grandfather; *mailen*
= farm; *plenish'd fairly* = well stocked

For gold the merchant ploughs the main,	One must never look down on a soldier as
The farmer ploughs the manor;	he is the mainstay in times of trouble.
But glory is the sodger's prize,	
The sodger's wealth is honour!	
The brave poor sodger ne'er despise,	
Nor count him as a stranger:	
Remember he's his country's stay	
In day and hour of danger.	