Meg O' The Mill

Anyone entering a loveless marriage for the sake of wealth and possessions could expect nothing but scorn from the Bard as the following verses show.

O ken ye what Meg o' the mill has gotten?
An' ken ye what Meg o' the mill has gotten?
She's gotten a coof wi' a claut o' siller,
And broken the heart o' the barley miller!

Do you know what Meg of the Mill has got? She's married a wealthy laird, breaking the heart of the miller.
ken = know; *coof* = dolt; *claut o' siller* = horde of money

The miller was strappin', the miller was ruddy,
A heart like lord, and a hue like a lady;
The laird was a widdifu', bleerit knurl—-
She's left the good-fellow, and ta'en the churl!

The miller was handsome, but the laird is repulsive.
widdifu' bleerit knurl = gallows-worthy; bleary-eyed dwarf; *churl* = miserable person

The miller, he hecht her a heart leal and luving;
The laird did address her wi' matter
mair moving,
A fine pacing-horse wi' a clear chained bridle,
A whip by her side, and a bonie side-saddle!

The miller offered love and devotion, but the laird's offer of a fine horse and all the trimmings was more tempting to Meg.
hecht = offered; *leal* = loyal; *mair* = more

O, wae on the siller, it is sae prevailing!
And wae on the luve that is fixed on a mailin!
A tocher's nae word in a true lover's parl,
But gie me my love, and a fig for the warl!

Money may be more attractive to Meg than a life of toiling on a farm, but a dowry should never be part of a lover's vocabulary.
wae = woe; *siller* = silver; *mailin* = farm; *tocher* = dowry; *parl* = speech; *warl* = world

Whistle An' I'll Come To You, My Lad

In this popular song, the lass is concerned that their relationship will be noticed by others, so she instructs the lad to make sure that he does not pay her attention should they meet outside.

CHORUS
O, whistle an' I'll come to ye, my lad!
O, whistle an' I'll come to ye, my lad!
Tho' father an' mither,and a' should gae mad,
O, whistle an' I'll come to ye, my lad!

But warily tent when ye come to court me,
And come nae unless the back-yett be a-jee;
Syne up the back-style, and let naebody see,
And come as ye were na comin to me,
And come as ye were na comin to me!

warily tent = be careful
yett = gate; *a-jee* = ajar

At kirk, or at market, whene'er ye meet me,
Gang by me as tho' ye car'd na a flie;
But steal me a blink o' your bonie black e'e,
Yet look as ye were na lookin at me,
Yet look as ye were na lookin at me!

gang = go

Ay vow and protest that ye care na for me,
And whyles ye may lightly my beauty a-wee;
But court nae anither, tho' jokin ye be,
For fear that she wyle your fancy frae me,
For fear that she wyle your fancy frae me!

may lightly my beauty a-wee = talk about me a little

Scots, Wha Hae

ROBERT BRUCE'S ADDRESS TO HIS ARMY AT BANNOCKBURN

The verses of this song, guaranteed to make the blood tingle in the veins of any true Scot, were written by Burns after visiting the field of Bannockburn in 1787. In common with most other Scots who have visited the site throughout the years, he appears to have been overwhelmed by the vision of a free Scotland, fired no doubt by the apparent success of the French Revolution which had dominated the news for the past year.

Scots, wha hae wi' Wallace bled,
Scots, wham Bruce has aften led,
Welcome to your gory bed,
Or to victorie!
Now's the day, and now's the hour;
See the front o' battle lour;
See approach proud Edward's power,
Chains and slavery.

As the time for battle draws near, Burns visualises Bruce reminding his men that Scots have already shed their blood alongside William Wallace, and that he, Bruce, has led them before against the enemy. Today however is win or die – or worse – become a slave of King Edward.
wha hae = who have; *wham* = whom; *gory* = bloody; *lour* = threaten

Wha will be a traitor-knave?
Wha can fill a coward's grave?
Wha sae base as be a slave?
Let him turn and flee!
Wha for Scotland's King and Law,
Freedom's sword will strongly draw,
Free-man stand or Free-man fa',
Let him follow me.

He asks if any of his men could be traitors or cowards or willing to accept the life of a slave. If so then turn and flee now or else live or die as free men.
sae base = so worthless

By Oppression's woes and pains!
By your Sons in servile chains!
We will drain your dearest veins,
But they *shall* be free!
Lay the proud usurpers low!
Tyrants fall in every foe!
Liberty's in every blow!
Let us Do – or Die!!!

To fight the oppressor is to fight for the freedom of their own children. They themselves may die in battle but their children will be free. Every blow struck is a blow for liberty. Fight or die!

My Luve is Like a Red, Red Rose

This is one of the most beautiful love-songs ever written. It is not known whether Burns had any lady in mind when he penned the words, but no one could fail to be enthralled by it.

O, my Luve's like a red, red rose.
That's newly sprung in June.
O, my Luve's like the melodie
That's sweetly play'd in tune.

sprung = blossomed

As fair art thou, my bonie lass,
So deep in luve am I,
And I will luve thee still, my Dear,
Till a' the seas gang dry.

till a' the seas gang dry = until the oceans dry up

Till a' the seas gang dry, my Dear,
And the rocks melt wi' the sun!
And I will luve thee still, my Dear,
While the sands o' life shall run.

And fare thee weel, my only Luve!
And fare thee weel, a while!
And I will come again, my Luve,
Tho' it were ten thousand mile!

Behold The Hour, The Boat Arrive

Second Version

The departure of Nancy McLehose was a major influence in the Bard's life. This is one of several poems written on her leaving.

Behold the hour, the boat arrive!
Thou goest, thou darling of my heart!
Sever'd from thee, can I survive?
But Fate has will'd, 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 mark'd her vanish'd sail.'

Along the solitary shore,
While flitting 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?'

You're Welcome, Willie Stewart

Another short example of how the friends of the Bard were immortalised through his verse. Willie Stewart was the son of a publican who Burns visited while carrying out his duties as an exciseman. The following lines were engraved onto a glass, much to the annoyance of the landlady. This glass eventually came into the possession of Sir Walter Scott and remains on view at Abbotsford to this day.

CHORUS

You're welcome, Willie Stewart!
You're welcome, Willie Stewart!
There's ne'er a flower that blooms in May,
That's half sae welcome's thou art!

Come, bumpers high! express your joy!
The bowl we maun renew it;
The tappet-hen, gae bring her ben,
To welcome Willie Stewart!

bumper = a glass filled to the brim; *maun* = must; *tappet-hen* = a six-pint jug; *ben* = through

May foes be strang, and friends be slack!
Ilk action may he rue it!
May woman on him turn her back,
That wrangs thee, Willie Stewart!

slack = free and open; *ilk* = each; *wrangs* = wrongs

A Man's a Man Far A' That

In this poem, Burns clearly reveals his contempt for rank and title. It was written in 1795, a year before his death, and it gives the impression that by that time he had developed an intense dislike of the aristocracy. Perhaps his rubbing shoulders with Edinburgh's upper-crust helped.

However, the fact remains that this poem has attained international recognition among those who believe in the equality of man. The Russians honoured Burns by issuing a set of commerative stamps to him during the twentieth-century and his works continue to be part of the school curriculum in that country.

Is there for honest poverty
That hings his head, and a' that?
The coward-slave, we pass him by,
We dare be poor for a' that !
For a' that, and a' that,
Our toils obscure, an' a' that
The rank is but the guinea's stamp,
The Man's the gowd for a' that.

Here Burns is telling us that although a man be poor and a hard worker, he is still a man. Burns has no time for either the servile creature who always hangs his head or for the would-be high and mighty person who bought such power.
hings = hangs; *gowd* = gold

What though on hamely fare we dine,
Wear hoddin grey and a' that.
Gie fools their silks, and knaves their wine,
A Man's a Man for a' that
For a' that and a' that,
Their tinsel show, and a' that,
The honest man, tho' e'er sae poor,
Is king o' men for a' that

Just because a man dines on simple food and wears clothes that may not be considered fashionable, it does not make him any less a man than one whose clothes are made of silk and who drinks wine.
hamely fare = homely food; *hoddin grey* = a coarse grey woollen cloth; *gie* = give

Ye see yon birkie ca'd, 'a lord,'
Wha struts, an stares, and a' that?
Tho' hundreds worship at his word,
He's but a cuif for a' that.
For a' that, and a' that,
His ribband, star and a' that,
The man o' independent mind,
He looks an' laughs at a' that.

Look at that swaggering fellow who is called 'a lord' with hundreds of people listening to his every word – in actual fact he is nothing but a fool. A real man just looks at all the ribbons and stars being worn and laughs at them.
birkie = a strutting swaggering fellow; *cuif (coof)* = fool; *ribband* = ribbon

A prince can mak a belted knight,
A marquis, duke, and a' that!
But an honest man's aboon his might,
Guid faith he mauna fa' that!
For a' that, and a' that,
Their dignities, and a' that
The pith o' Sense an' pride o' Worth,
Are higher rank than a' that

Any man can be given a title by royalty but that does not make him any better than an honest man who has faith in himself. To know one's worth is value in excess of the foolish dignity of these people.
mak = make; *aboon* = above; *gude* = good; *mauna* = must not; *pith* = importance

Then let us pray that come it may,
As come it will for a' that,
That Sense and Worth, o'er a' the earth,
Shall bear the gree, and a' that.
For a' that, and a' that,
It's comin' yet for a' that,
That Man to Man, the world o'er,
Shall brithers be for a' that.

However, let us pray that one of those days men will see the pointlessness of struggle over rank and power and come to recognise that all men are equal.
bear the gree = win the victory

The Dumfries Volunteers

In sharp contrast to the profoundly Scottish sentiments expressed in *Scots Wha Hae*, here Burns appears to be truly British, although there is a suspicion that this may have been an attempt to satisfy his masters in the Customs and Excise. In 1795 there was great speculation that Emperor Napoleon was set to invade the British Isles and this led to the formation of the Volunteers Movement, an early version of the Home Guard of the Second World War. Burns was heavily involved in the formation of the Dumfries group and certainly appears to have enjoyed this aspect of his life. One can only wonder what Robert Burns would have made of today's squabbles with Britain's so-called European partners?

Does haughty Gaul invasion threat?
Then let the loons beware, Sir!
There's wooden walls upon our seas,
And volunteers on shore, Sir.!
The Nith shall run to Corsincon,
And Criffel sink in Solway,
Ere we permit a foreign foe
On British ground to rally!

He points out that should the French be foolish enough to launch an invasion not only will they have to face the British Navy but if they ever get to land, they will be confronted by the ranks of volunteers. The River Nith and the hills of Corsincon and Criffel will have to perform geographical miracles before any enemy of Britain will rally on British soil. *Gaul* = France; *loons* = rascals; *wooden walls* = ships

O, let us not, like snarling tykes
In wrangling be divided;
Till, slap! come in an unco loon
And wi' a rung decide it.
Be Britain still to Britain true,
Amang oursels united;
For never but by British hands
Maun British wrangs be righted!

He warns that fighting among ourselves could be fatal, as we are liable to find too late that the enemy has taken over and that they now rule the British with clubs and cudgels. Only by remaining united will the British right the wrongs within Britain.
tykes = dogs; *unco* = fearsome; *rung* = cudgel; *mang* = among; *maun* = must; *wrangs* = wrongs

The kettle o' the Kirk and State
Perhaps a clout may fail in't;
But deil a foreign tinkler-loun
Shall ever ca' a nail in 't!
Our fathers' bluid the kettle bought,
And wha wad dare to spoil it!
By heaven, the sacreligious dog
Shall fuel be to boil it!

There may be differences between Church and State but no foreigner is going to be allowed to interfere. British freedom was bought with the blood of our forefathers so heaven help anyone who attempts to take away that freedom – especially a Frenchman!
kettle = boiling pot; *Kirk* = church; *clout* = piece of cloth; *tinkler* = gypsy; *ca'* = drive; *bluid*= blood; *wha wad* = who would

The wretch that wad a tyrant own,
And the wretch, his true-sworn brother,
Who would set the mob aboon the throne,
May they be damned together!
Who will not sing '*God save the King*,'
Shall hang as high's the steeple;
But while we sing '*God save the King*,'
We'll ne'er forget the people.

Any despicable person who would help overthrow the King, and refuses to swear allegiance to the throne, will be hanged. But remember, even as we swear loyalty to our King, we must never overlook the rights of the common man.
aboon = above

How Cruel Are The Parents

There is little doubt but that Burns was a womaniser, but could it be that he was also a visionary who had an extraordinary insight into the plight of women?

How cruel are the parents
Who riches only prize,
And to the wealthy booby,
Poor Woman sacrifice.
Meanwhile the hapless daughter
Has but a choice of strife;
To shun a tyrant father's hate,
Become a wretched wife.

booby = stupid fellow

The ravening hawk pursuing,
The trembling dove thus flies,
To shun impelling ruin
Awhile her pinions tries;
Till, of escape despairing,
No shelter or retreat,
She trusts the ruthless falconer,
And drops beneath his feet.

Address to The Toothache

Medicine may have been somewhat primitive in the eighteenth century, but dentistry was pure torture. Toothcare was unheard of and toothache was common.

My curse upon your venom'd stang,
That shoots my tortur'd gums alang,
An' thro' my lug gies monie a twang
Wi' gnawing vengeance,
Tearing my nerves wi' bitter pang,
Like racking engines!

He curses the toothache for the pain it is giving him.
stang = sting; *lug* = ear; *twang* = twinge; *alang* = along; *monie* = many

A' down my beard the slavers trickle,
I throw the wee stools o'er the mickle,
While round the fire the giglets keckle,
To see me loup,
An' raving mad, I wish a heckle
Were i' their doup!

Giggling girls watch him dance around his fire like a madman, and he wishes that they had a rough comb up their backsides.
mickle = large; *giglets keckle* = girls giggle; *a heckle* = heckling comb; *doup* = backside.

When fevers burn, or ague freezes,
Rheumatics gnaw, or colic squeezes,
Our neebors sympathise to ease us,
Wi' pitying moan;
But thou!—- the hell o' a' diseases—
They mock our groan!

Neighbours will show sympathy towards other illnesses but will only mock if you have toothache.
neebors = neighbours

Of a' the numerous human dools—
Ill hairsts, daft bargains, cutty-stools,
Or worthy frien's laid i' the mools,
Sad sight to see!
The tricks o' knaves, or fash o' fools—
Thou bear'st the gree!

Of all the woes suffered by humanity, toothache takes the prize.
dools = woes; *ill hairsts* = poor harvests; *daft bargains* = madness; *cutty-stools* = stools of repentance; *mools* = crumbling earth; *fash* = annoyance; *bear'st the gree* = rank highly

Whare'er that place be priests ca' Hell,
Whare a' the tones o' misery yell,
An' ranked plagues their numbers tell,
In dreadfu' raw,
Thou, *Toothache*, surely bear'st the bell
Aboon them a'!

Toothache would be at home in Hell.
raw = row; *bears't the bell* = take the prize; *aboon* = above

O! thou grim, mischief-making chiel,
That gars the notes o' discord squeel,
Till human-kind aft dance a reel
In gore a shoe thick,
Gie a' the faes o' Scotland's weal
A Towmond's Toothache!

He hopes that Scotland's foes will suffer a twelve-month toothache.
chiel = fellow; *faes* = foes; *weal* = *well-being*; *towmond* = twelve months

The Toad-eater

The Toad-eater displays Burns' contempt for those who boasted of their wealth and social standing.

This short tirade was directed at one young man in particular who had made a great deal of money through speculation and who, although born of low rank, considered himself to be in the higher echelons of society.

What of earls with whom you have supt,
And of Dukes that you dined with yestreen?
Lord! A louse, Sir is still but a louse,
Though it crawl on the curls of a queen.

supt = supped
yestreen = yesterday evening

On Marriage

This verse illustrates Burns' inability to dedicate his life to one woman.

That hackney'd judge of human life,
The Preacher and the King,
Observes: 'The man that gets a wife,
He gets a noble thing.'

That hackney'd judge = King Solomon

But how capricious are mankind,
Now loathing, now desirous!
We married men, how oft we find
The best of things will tire us!

Charlie, He's My Darling

An old bawdy ballad, refined by Burns, referring to Bonny Prince Charlie's romantic escapades.

CHORUS
An' Charlie, he's my darling.
My darling, my darling,
Charlie, he's my darling—
The Young Chevalier!

'Twas on a Monday morning
Right early in the year,
That Charlie came to our town—
The Young Chevalier!

As he was walking up the street
The city for to view,
O, there he spied a bonie lass
The window looking thro'!

Sae light's he jimped up the stair,
And tirl'd at the pin;
And wha sae ready as hersel
To let the laddie in!

tirl'd on the pin = rattled the door knob.

He set his Jenny on his knee,
In all his Highland dress;
For brawlie weel he kend the way
To please a bonie lass.

It's up yon heathery mountain
And down the scroggy glen,
We daurna gang a-milking
For Charlie and his men!

The Lass That Made The Bed To Me

This old ballad appears to have originated in the border counties of England, but has been revised by Burns.

When Januar wind was blawin cauld,
As to the North I took my way,
The mirksome night did me enfauld,
I knew na whare to lodge till day.

By my guid luck a maid I met,
Just in the middle o' my care,
And kindly she did me invite
To walk into a chamber fair.

I bow'd fu' low unto this maid,
And thank'd her for her courtesie;
I bow'd fu' low unto this maid,
An' bade her mak a bed for me.

She made the bed baith large and wide,
Wi' twa white hands she spread it down;
She put the cup to her rosy lips,
And drank;— 'Young man, now sleep ye sound.'

She snatch'd the candle in her hand,
And frae the chamber went wi' speed,
But I call'd her quickly back again
To lay some mair below my head.

A cod she laid below my head,
And served me wi' due respect,
And to salute her wi' a kiss,
I put my arms about her neck.

cod = pillow

'Haud aff your hands, young man!' she says, *haud aff* = take off
'And dinna sae uncivil be;
Gif you have onie luve for me, *gif* = if; *onie* = ony
O, wrang na my virginitie!'

Her hair was like the links o' gowd, *gowd* = gold
Her teeth were like the ivorie,
Her cheeks like lilies dipt in wine,
The lass that made the bed to me!

Her bosom was the driven snaw,
Twa drifted heaps sae fair to see;
Her limbs the polish'd marble stane,
The lass that made the bed to me!

I kiss'd her o'er and o'er again,
And ay she wist na what to say, *wist* = wished
I laid her 'tween me and the wa'—
That lassie thocht na long till day.

Upon the morrow, when we raise,
I thank'd her for her courtesie;
But ay she blush'd, and ay she sigh'd,
And said, 'Alas, ye've ruined me!'

I clasp'd her waist, and kiss'd her syne,
While the tear stood twinkling in her e'e,
I said, 'My lassie, dinna cry,
For ye ay shall make the bed to me.'

She took her mither's Holland sheets,
An' made them a' in sarks to me, *sarks* = shirts
Blythe and merry may she be,
The lass that made the bed to me!

The bonie lass made the bed to me,
The braw lass made the bed to me!
I'll ne'er forget till the day that I die,
The lass that made the bed to me.

Had I The Wyte

A traditional bawdy song, again collected and revised by Burns. It is a story of a battered wife seeking solace with another man.

Had I the wyte? had I the wyte?
Had I the wyte? she bade me!
She watch'd me by the hie-gate side,
And up the loan she shaw'd me,
And when I wadna venture in,
A coward loon she ca'd me!
Had Kirk and State been in the gate,
I lighted when she bade me.

Was it his fault that the lady had invited him into her cottage and taunted him when he appeared reluctant? Had he considered the consequences, he would have rode on.
had I the wyte = was I to blame? *hie-gate* = high-road; *shaw'd* = showed; *loon* = fool; *lighted* = mounted

Sae craftily she took me ben
And bade me mak nae clatter:—
'For our ramgunshoch, glum, guidman
Is o'er ayont the water.'
Whae'er shall say I wanted grace
When I did kiss and dawte her,
Let him be planted in my place,
Syne say I was the fauter!

She led him through the house, telling him to be silent although her surly husband was well out of the way. He felt no guilt as they made love.
ben = through; *clatter* = noise; *ramgunshoch* = bad-tempered; *guidman* = husband; *ayont* = beyond; *dawte* = caress; *syne* = then; *fauter* = wrong-doer

Could I for shame, could I for shame,
Could I for shame refus'd her?
And wadna manhood been to blame
Had I unkindly used her?
He claw'd her wi' the ripplin'-kame,
And blae and bluidy bruis'd her—
When sic a husband was frae hame,
What wife but wad excus'd her?

He felt he could not refuse her, but had to treat her with care as she had suffered brutality at the hands of her husband. Who could blame such a woman for seeking pleasure when her husband was out of the way?
ripplin-kame = wool-comb; *blae* = blue; *bluidy* = bloody

I dighted ay her een sae blue,
An' bann'd the cruel randy,
And, weel I wat her willin mou,
Was e'en as succarcandie.
At gloamin-shot, it was, I wot,
I lighted – on the Monday;
But I cam thro' the Tyeseday's dew,
To wanton Willie's brandy.

He wiped the tears from her eyes and cursed her cruel husband. It was evening when he left, but he was back again the following morning to visit her again.

dighted = wiped; *bann'd* = cursed; *randy* = ruffian; *wat* = know; *mou* = mouth; *gloamin-shot* = sunset; *Tyseday* = Tuesday

For The Sake O' Somebody

These two short verses were not, as we have come to expect, written by the Bard about a very special young lady. In fact they were written by Burns about no less a person than Bonnie Prince Charlie

My heart is sair, I dare na tell,
My heart is sair for Somebody,
I could wake a winter night,
For the sake o' Somebody!
Oh-hon! For Somebody!
Oh-hey! For Somebody!
I could range the warld around
For the sake o' Somebody.

sair = sore; *dare na* = dare not

Ye Powers that smile on virtuous love,
O, sweetly smile on Somebody!
Frae ilka danger keep him free,
And send me safe my Somebody!
Oh-hon! for Somebody!
Oh-hey! for Somebody!
I wad do – what wad I not?
For the sake o' Somebody

frae = from; *ilka* = every

wad = would

Gude Wallace

This is another popular old ballad extolling the heroics of Scotland's most famous warrior, William Wallace. Burns has added seven stanzas of his own to the original but there is a gap of two lines in the poem, lost in the mists of time. This a story in the true 'Braveheart' tradition, full of exaggerated heroism and with blood up to the ankles.

'O for my ain king,' quo gude Wallace,
The rightful king o' fair Scotland;
'Between me and my Sovereign Blude
I think I see some ill seed sawn.'

Wallace wanted to see the English king removed from the Scottish throne.
quo = said; *Blude* = blood; *sawn* = sown

Wallace out over yon river he lap,
And he has lighted low down on yon plain,
And he was aware of a gay ladie,
As she was at the well washing.

As he travelled south he happened upon a lady.
lap = leapt

'What tydins, what tydins, fair lady, he says,
What tydins hast thou to tell unto me;
What tydins, what tydins fair lady,' he says,
'What tydins hae ye in the South Countrie.'

He sought information from her of local activity.
tydins = tidings

'Low down in yon wee Ostler house,
There is fyfteen Englishmen,
And they are seeking for gude Wallace,
It's him to take and him to hang.'

She warned him of a party of redcoats in the local inn asking of his whereabouts as they intend to see him hanged.
Ostler house = inn

'There's nocht in my purse,' quo gude Wallace,
'There's nocht, not even a bare pennie;
But I will go down to yon wee Ostler house,
Thir fyfteen Englishmen to see.'

Wallace apologised to the lady that he was unable to reward her, but declared that he would go and investigate for himself.
nocht = nothing; *yon* = that

And when he cam to yon wee Ostler house
He bad benedicite be there;
(The Englishmen at the table sat
The wine-fac'd captain at him did stare.)

He prayed for good fortune as he reached the inn.
bad = bade; *benedicite* = good fortune

'Where was ye born, auld crookit Carl,
Where was ye born, in what countrie;'
'I am a true Scot born and bred,
And an auld, crookit carl just sic as ye see.'

Disguised as an old man, he was asked by the captain where he was born, and replied that he was a true Scot.
auld crookit carl = bent old man

'I wad gie fyfteen shillings to onie crookit carl,
To onie crookit carl just sic as ye,
If ye will get me gude Wallace,
For he is a man I wad very fain see.'

The captain then offered him a reward if he would help him locate Wallace.
sic = such; *fain* = gladly; *onie* =any

He hit the proud Captain alang the chafft-blade,
That never a bit o' meat he ate mair;
And he sticket the rest at the table where they sat,
And he left them a' lyin sprawlin there.

Wallace killed the captain with a single blow, then killed the rest of the party as they sat at the table.
chafft-blade = jaw-bone; *sticket* = stabbed

'Get up, get up, gudewife,' he says,
'And get to me some dinner in haste;
For it soon will be three lang days
Sin I a bit o' meat did taste.'

He then asks the innkeeper's wife to pepare him a meal as it is three days since he has eaten.

The dinner was na weel readie,
Nor was it on the table set,
Till other fyfteen Englishmen
Were a' lighted about the yett.

But before it was prepared, another group of fifteen redcoats were at the gate.

yett = gate

'Come out, come out now, gude Wallace,
This is the day that thou maun die;'
'I lippen nae sae little to God,' he says,
'Altho' I be but ill- wordie.'

They called for him to surrender and be hanged, but he has faith in God.
maun = must; *lippen* = trust; *ill-wordie* = ill-worthy.

The gudewife had an auld gudeman,
By gude Wallace he stiffly stood,
Till ten o' the fyfteen Englishmen
Before the door lay in their blude.

The innkeeper stood side-by-side with Wallace and soon ten of the redcoats lay dead.
blude = blood

The other five to the greenwood ran,
And he hang'd these five upon a grain:
And on the morn wi' his merry men a'
He sat at dine in Lochmaben town.

The other five ran to hide in the woods, yet their escape was short-lived as Wallace's men hanged them from a branch before continuing their march south.
grain = branch

The Henpecked Husband

This is a very straightforward, no-holds barred poem by the Bard.

Curs'd be the man, the poorest wretch in life,
The crouching vassal to the tyrant wife!
Who has no will but by her high permission;
Who has not sixpence but in her possession;
Who must to her his dear friend's secret tell;
Who dreads a curtain-lecture worse than hell.
Were such the wife had fallen to my part,
I'd break her spirit, or I'd break her heart.
I'd charm her with the magic of a switch,
I'd kiss her maids, and kick the perverse bitch.

vassal = slave;

curtain-lecture = a lecture given in bed by a wife to her husband,

switch = cane

Inscription To Miss Jessie Lewars

It seems appropriate that the final verse in this collection should be to Jessie Lewars, who lived opposite Robert Burns in Dumfries, and whose brother was a colleague of Burns in his Excise days. She helped nurse the Bard through his dying months and took care of his four sons when he eventually died.

Burns presented Jessie with a set of volumes of the Scots Musical Museum and inscribed the following lines on the back of them.

Thine be the volumes, Jessie fair,
And with them take the Poet's prayer:
That Fate may in her fairest page,
With ev'ry kindliest, best presage
Of future bliss enrol thy name;
With native worth, and spotless fame,
With wakeful caution, still aware
Of ill— but chief, Man's felon snare!
All blameless joys on earth we find,
And all the treasures of the mind—
These be thy guardian and reward!
So prays thy faithful friend, the Bard.

DUMFRIES, *June 26, 1796* ROBERT BURNS

Less than a month after writing these lines to Jessie Lewars, Robert Burns died on the 21st July, 1796, in Dumfries, and Scotland mourned the loss of one of her greatest sons.

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