

Poems by George M. Murdo.



St Cuthbert Cottage
Catrine

Mr Farguhar

Please accept this tribute
of Respect, from your humble Servant
The Author

A Manuscript Collier

Sept 1888



❖ POEMS ❖

AND

MISCELLANEOUS PIECES.

BY

GEORGE M'MURDO,
Muirkirk.

SECOND EDITION.

"A thing slipped idly from me.
Our poesy is a gum, which oozes
From whence 'tis nourished ; The fire in the flint
Shows not till it be struck ; our gentle flame
Provokes itself, and, like the current, flies
Each bound it chafes."

(Timon of Athens.)

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PREFACE TO 1ST EDITION.

THE following Poems and Miscellaneous Pieces are printed by request. Several of them have already appeared in the columns of the Weekly Press, and many have had a large circulation in manuscript form amongst the numerous friends and acquaintances of the Author. In this utilitarian age, when everything is estimated at its money value, the matter-of-fact, prosaic side of human life is under the greatest possible strain. Our wild Highland glens are being invaded by the iron horse, whose puffing will start the deer from the bracken, and scare the wild fox from its lair. The deeds of chivalry and knights of romance find no place in modern history ;—

“The mighty ones of old are all departed,
Warriors from ruined hall, and elves from rock and stream.”

Distance is being annihilated by steam ; and the electric wire, like a girdle of light, is encircling the earth. Artificial and unnatural as life is daily becoming, a glance at the “Poet’s Corner” of any of our journals will convince anyone that the “golden cadence of Poesy had never such an array of votaries.”

Intensely sceptical and hypercritical, too, has this age become, and holds as vain or fabulous

“What the sage poets, taught by the heavenly muse,
Storyed of old in high immortal verse,
Of dire chimæras and enchanted isles.”

Rifled though Nature has been of many of her secrets, and despoiled of many of her fairest forms by the ruthless hand of man, yet we can boast in Anderson of a poet of the railway ; in David Wingate of a poet of the mine, proving that there is no real antagonism betwixt Poetry and Science, but the very reverse. When Coleridge predicated of Poetry that it was in antithesis of Science, many echoed the sentiment, and exclaimed that Science would invade the realms of Poetry and drive her from her throne. But, while one scientific discovery is being added to another, poets are increasing.

“Thus truth was multiplied on truth, the world
Like one great garden showed ;
And, through the wreath of floating dark upcurled,
Rare sunrise flowed.

The capriciousness of the Muse of Poetry is a trite though true proverb. Pope lisping in numbers at twelve, Janet Hamilton at sixty, are striking proofs that this faculty knows no art, and recognises no master. Most unlikely places, most improbable seasons, have witnessed its origin.

Whilst we make no boast of any exalted genius, wit, or taste in these poems, we lay claim to the fact "that no levelled malice infects one comma," no nipping satire will be found which can wound the most sensitive, and no opprobrious invective, which only reveals the spirit of revenge. The most of them are simple lays, depicting homely and familiar scenes. A generous and kindly spirit animates them all, and in "The Pit Mouse" a refined sensibility and lively sympathy are expressed in these lines:—

"Tho' whiles the moosie, desp'rate grown,
Ere breakfast time has come,
May hole your napkin, ilka ply,
And help itsel to some;
Oh dinna lift the cruel fit,
Or fling the deadly coal;
Forgie the scamperin', frichted thing,
For hunger's ill to thole."

Not only to the mine, but to the accustomed haunts of his adopted parish, we follow him, where his ideas of beauty are associated with the warm and kindly feelings of the heart:—

"I hear the glad shout o' the bairns as they gambol
Upon the green sward, 'neath thy sheltering wing;
I see lovers meeting, in rapture to ramble
O'er Wellwood's gay heights 'mid the glories o' Spring.
At eve, roun' thy ingle, the youthfu' and hoary
Sit subjects a' leal to affection's calm sway;
The winter nicht passes wi' sang and wi' story,
That ocht should divide them—'Blawearie, I'm wae.'"

The language is plain and unambitious, and his command over his native Doric stands him in good stead. Few of his many thousand brethren have attempted to tune the lay, and the strong class feeling which unites them all will make this a welcome book on their shelf.

George M'Murdo is a son of the mine, and in it he has passed a life of toil and moil. Like too many of his class twenty years ago, his education was not a matter of primary consideration. A few months now and again under Mr John Hodge, and other teachers, at Wellwood Row, and Mr Alexander Brownlie, in the Ironwork

School, Muirkirk, barely took him over the rudiments of an elementary education. At twelve he donned the "auld greasy lamp," and steadily has he kept to it these twenty-three years. His fellow-workmen, in their life of daring and drudgery, will find it an echo of their own unuttered musings, and to them this, his first unpretentious, volume is humbly dedicated. To their care it is committed, knowing, as he well does, that they, with all their faults, respect humility and kindliness, and honour the man of unselfish and honest endeavours.

A. D.

MUIRKIRK, 6th Nov., 1882.

PREFACE TO 2ND EDITION.

It is, perhaps, premature in thus again issuing, in book form, the gleanings of my pen. Had I yielded to my own inclinations, I would have been less hasty, and waited until a more perfect volume could have been produced. The solicitations of my friends prevailed. Those of them who knew I had many pieces not contained in the first edition, and many others who failed to procure a copy of it—as it was, for the most part, subscribed for beforehand—have induced me, rather against my better judgment, to publish once more. Of course, I will not say that flattered vanity has nothing to do with it: the hearty reception of former efforts by all parties, and in most unlooked-for quarters, possibly stirred the slumbering ambition in my breast. Be that as it may, the book is now an accomplished fact; and I can only hope that it may prove, at least, readable to those having the advantage of me in the matter of education and refinement, and will overlook anything uttered in bad taste. I am quite sure many pieces herein contained will touch a sympathetic chord in the bosom of not a few of my peers in the mine, whose troubles and vicissitudes of life I have frequently endeavoured, however faulty, to portray.

GEORGE M'MURDO.

CATRINE, *January, 1888.*



P O E M S .

Christmas Eve.

* **T** WAS Christmas eve, and the moon shone bright,
In a mantle of snow the land lay white,
Freezing keen from the north came the breeze,
Wearily sighing through the leafless trees—
A night to be sad, or be merry with glee,
As each one's case with events did agree.

Up in the mansion, all dazzling with light,
No cold entered there on this festive night.
Of a joyous throng was the great house full,
All grandly dressed to commemorate yule.
Mistletoe hung in the midst of the hall,
Ever-green holly decorated the wall ;
With richest of viands the boards were spread,
Wines of the rarest, pale-coloured and red ;
Deer from the forest, the pheasant and hare,
Steamed 'mong the numberless dishes of fare ;
The plump fat goose, prime chickens, turkey-cocks,
Shoulders of mutton, and roasts from the ox ;
Wild ducks in abundance, turtle so rare,
And endless the fish from the ocean there—
Catered and cooked that each guest may be sate,
And upheld the rank of a rich man great.

Thus fared the guests at the bountiful board,
Thus solemnized was the birth of our Lord.
Anon came the sound of sweet music and song,
Minutes mirth-leaden sped gaily along,
Each one revelling in frolic and fun,
Long after the glorious day had begun,
Till the moon stole quietly away from the feast,
And a light sublime had appeared in the east.
Wearied with pleasure, the party at length
On Morpheus calls that renewed be their strength ;
Nor see they the symbol of life that has hurl'd
Bright rays of divinity over the world :
To fashion devoted, they held in their way
A Christmas eve and a Christmas day.

* * * * *

It was Christmas eve in a humble cot,
Where a collier dwelt so lowly ;
Of festive fare he had but for his share
An evergreen sprig of holly.

Children and wife in his lot had a part,
His breast heaved sadly to see them
Enduring the pinch of want inch by inch,
And powerless he to relieve them.

No radiant light from the window shone,
No fire but some waning embers ;
Deep, deep was the sigh, as with tearful eye,
Happier days he remembers.

Cold was the room, clad in rags were they all,
Where the fire had been they sat shivering ;
The building, so mean, ill served as a screen,
From the freezing wind so withering.

Deep down in a mine, amid vapours foul,
Had toiled the man late and early,
For a crust of bread and a lowly shed ;
To those whom he loved so dearly.

Did he rest one day from his tiresome toil,
Self-blamed was he then for stealing
The sustenance bare of his children fair —
Full of remorse was the feeling.

But the strongest arm it will cease to swing,
Let the need be e'er so urgent ;
And the stoutest back will double and break
When sore with oppression burdened.

Like a very slave he had toiled until
His muscles cracked and tendons parted,
Till the pick from such a nerveless clutch
Dropt down, he all but broken-hearted.

Hard was the fortune that household bore
Ere the last mishap did own them,
Now misery seems, in pitiless streams,
Like a raging tide to drown them.

Friendless and breadless, the world's dark frown
Quietly they suffer in silence,
Their hope nearly gone, but true love alone
To deepest woe bids defiance.

And they looked at the evergreen leaf and saw
A world where welcomes the stranger—
A star twinkled too, shedding light anew
On the infant in the manger.

Such was the source of their love, and the thought
Took the sharpest edge from their sorrow ;
And they drank once more of life's fountain pure
When dawned the Christmas morrow.



Catrine.

HAIL, Catrine, village snug and clean,
Deep lying in a glen sae green,
Frae tramps and vagrants a' unseen
Until they drap,
Wi' pleasure dancin' in their een,
Upon thy tap.

Thy buildings plain, yet placed wi' skill,
Like volunteers drawn up for drill,
And in thy midst the muckle mill,
Wi' stately air,
Seems guardin' thee frae every ill
That threaten dare.

'Tis there thy fairest daughters meet,
Like heroines to toil and sweat,
And justly win the bread they eat,
At frame or loom ;
Or spinnin' carriage trim and neat,
Spent is their bloom.

Lang may the spindle run its race,
While belt and shaft each ither chase,
And every wheel keep up the pace,
Wi' proper speed ;
And deftly may the shuttle place
The slender thread.

Lang may the lassies spin their clue
And weave their wab wi' cheerie broo,
Trim up their hair in fashions new,
And saucy seem ;
To them an ample meed is due,
O' high esteem.

For beauty, Catrine, you've a name
That bears the highest stamp o' fame,
And justice, too, uphands thy claim
We must confess ;
Aroun' thee Nature has her hame,
In brawest dress.

Thy 'voes are jewels o' the best,
Like silver glitt'ring on thy breast ;
The waters there a moment rest,
Their strength to feel,
Ere doon the mine they rush in haste,
To ca' the wheel.

(And what a wheel o' bulky power ;
A hillside turnin' ower and ower
Wad hardly make a body glower
Mair struck wi' awe,
As lazy mid the might shower
It turns awa'.)

To westward, barely half a mile,
Is seen the House o' Ballochmyle.
An honoured name baith in oor isle
And yont the brine,
Sin' Rabbie sang o't in a style
Untouch'd sin' syne.

And there the bonnie woods and braes
Through which auld Ayr sae blythsome plays,
Where mony a pilgrim joyful strays
In simmer sweet,
Upon the pretty scene to gaze,
Entranced complete.

Nor eastward does the beauty fade,
Viewed frae the radical braehead,

Daldoroch in the lovely glade
 The eye will please,
 Reposing sweetly in the shade
 O' sturdy trees.

And on the Eden fair extends,
 Till hidden where the river bends,
 And Sorn Castle wi' it blends
 The finest art ;
 To soothe the soul the vision tends,
 And cheers the heart.

Fareweel, thou home of beauty, may
 Thy sons and daughters day by day
 Aye prosper in the projects they
 In haun hae taen,
 And may the gruesome grip o' Wae
 Be felt by nane.

Charity.—A Sonnet.

LIKE Metal seven times refined
 Is Charity, meek, modest, kind,
 Sterling coin to mankind given,
 Struck in the royal mint of heaven.
 Our Lord and Saviour all may trace
 Engraven on its golden face.
 The very poorest of the land
 May here have wealth at their command.
 No coin has virtue such as this—
 A passport to the realms of bliss.
 Oh ! happy those who it possess,
 Its worth ne'er wanes, its reign endless :
 And in its everlasting fame
 Possessors have an equal claim.

The Woods o' Sorn.

WHEN Beauty, child of Nature fair,
Bedeck'd auld Scotia's plaid
Wi' flowery nooks and crystal brooks,
And woodland waving wide,
Wi' special care the river Ayr
She gaily did adorn,
And wi' her brush a master touch
Was gi'en the glen o' Sorn.

There, shaded frae the northern win',
The gowan blooms fu' braw,
When ither flowers, in ither bowers,
Are hid in wreaths o' snaw.
When Winter, snell, o'er hill and dale
Toots on his loodest horn,
The echo faint is quietly spent
Among the woods o' Sorn.

When Sol, wi' golden ray, awakes
The infant Simmer day,
Then birdies thrang are wi' their sang
On bush, on bank and brae.
In such array they chant their lay
Sae sweetly ilka morn ;
Enchanting dells and magic spells
Make glad the woods o' Sorn.



The Reformed Drunkard's Song.

YE tipplers all, both great and small,
Give ear a while to me,
Till I rehearse in simple verse
The woes of barley-bree.
There was not one in all the land
Than I loved whisky more,
Which makes me gaze on former days
And sore their waste deplore.

Alas ! they're gone nor can return,
My youth and vigour sweet ;
I'm left with nought but solemn thought
And dark remorse complete.
It makes me cry, A fool was I
When drinking I began ;
'Twas not the way, you'll truly say,
Was e'er designed for man.

Man, ere his fall, and after all,
Stood far above the brute,
Until, like me, to raise the spree
Inventions new found oot.
For sake of drink when I'd no clink
I would have sold my soul—
A subject true, ye will aloo',
To great King Alcohol.

But now, you see, I'm fairly free,
And out of his control ;
My name, I'll swear, no more he'll wear
Upon his hateful roll.
And so, my friends, my song here ends,
I wish you all farewell ;
But pause and think on cursed drink—
It's way leads down to h—l.

Blawearie, I'm Wae.

BLAWEARIE, I'm wae when aroun' thee I wander,
And silently sigh o'er the days that are gane;
But still you hae charms, for I ever get fonder
At gloamin' beside thee to ponder alane.
There white is the gowan, and green is the bracken,
When fann'd by the gladdening breezes o' May;
Alas! amid beauty you languish, forsaken,
To gaze on your ruin—"Blawearie, I'm wae."

I see you again through the shadow of ages,
Sae tidy and trim, though your station is low;
No Peer of the realm your protection engages,
But warmth frae your hearth roun' the Peasant ye throw.
Tho' buskit sae meanly wi' thack and turf riggin',
A but-an'-ben simple, wi' winnocks but twae,
The lustre o' love consecrates thy auld biggin',
That love should hae limits—"Blawearie, I'm wae."

I hear the glad shout o' the bairns, as they gambol
Upon the green sward, 'neath thy sheltering wing;
I see lovers meeting, in rapture to ramble
O'er Wellwood's gay heights, 'mid the glories o' Spring.
At eve, roun' thy ingle, the youthfu' and hoary
Sit subjects a' leal to affection's calm sway;
The winter nicht passes wi' sang and wi' story,
That oucht should divide them—"Blawearie, I'm wae."

But, oh ! they are gane, like the mist frae Cairntable,
 When Sol adds his ray to the fresh rising breeze ;
 With Death some are sleeping, while fortune unstable
 Makes ithers to wander far over the seas.
 And lowly ye lie, broken down and deserted ;
 All silent and cheerless, that ance was sae gay ;
 But Destiny's mandate—oh, wha can avert it !—
 That time makes sic changes—“ Blawearie, I'm wae.”

I cling to you still, tho' your glory is ended,
 And rank grows the nettle where stood the big chair ;
 With sweetest of mem'ries your name's ever blended,
 The dream of the past is a shield frae despair.
 The lark in the lift sings as sweetly as ever,
 The mavis as blythe at the close of the day,
 But lo'ed ones thus parted can meet me, ah ! never,
 And sad is my heart at—“ Blawearie sae wae.”

Blawearie Jock.

BLAEWEARIE JOCK, and Coutburn Jean,
 Were lovers blythe and trusty ;
 She was a strappin' country queen,
 He was a collier dusty.
 Where Tibbie's Brig the Garpel spans,
 They met a'e nicht to lay their plans,
 He tald his love, spoke o' the bans,
 And, oh, his voice was husky !

Oh, Jean ! I'm but a collier chiel,
 By fools I'm disrespected ;
 But I've a heart as true as steel,
 Tho' lair I hae neglected.
 Gin ye'll consent, my bonnie lass,
 To share wi' me what comes to pass,
 My heart will be your looking-glass—
 Your image there reflected.

My worldly gear is unco scant,
My working graith's the maist o't ;
But while I've health the ills o' want
We'll never hae a taste o't.
I've mell and wedge the coal to rive,
A splendid shool : a num'er five,
It's just a teaspoon when I strive
My strength to mak' the maist o't.

Then, Jeanie, gin ye'll grant my boon
Nae mair I'll drink and quarrel,
But tend ye till ye're fat an' roun'
As ony butter barrel.
And when I've dug my darg o' coal
Wi' joy together we will stroll,
And listen tae the lark's carol
Ayont by sweet Polquharel.

His buttered words on Jeanie's heart
Fell saft, and oucht but eerie ;
She lo'ed him frae the very start,
And could say nocht but dearie.
Sae there and then she gied consent,
And naething caused her tae repent,
For happy was the life she spent
With Jockie o' Blawearie.

Geordie Chapman.

OH, where has Geordie Chapman gane ?—
His form among the crood I miss !
Of wealth has he the notion taen,
And cross'd the ocean, far frae this ?
Oh, no ! Nae mammon hunter he ;
Nor wad he cross the briny sea,
Frae Scotia dear to sever :

The Auld Pit Pony.

PUIR auld Donal, lang ye've been
A hard wroucht collier, yaul when young;
But sweet daylight you've never seen,
Since doon the pit ye first were swung.

And a' the evils o' the place,
On thee hae fa'en wi' double force ;
Noo broken-win'd and slow o' pace,
Yer naething but an auld done horse.

Mony an accident befel,
That laid thee low wi' fearfu' crash ;
But while your leg-banes a' were hale,
Your doctor was the driver's lash.

I've seen the skin torn off your back,
Wi' roof ower laigh to let ye through ;
And if a dumb protest you'd mak,
The cruel lash was raised anew.

Nae cruelty prevention clan,
Have agents doon the darksome hole ;
Unseen, uncared for, horse and man,
Maun silently their sorrows thole.

Until yer scarcely fit to crawl
(Like mony a brither, reason-crowned),
But still your burden ye maun haul
Till lying lifeless you are found.

And, Donal, rest shall soon be thine,
Thy look fortells the time is near,
When a' the horrors of the mine
And driver's lash nae mair you'll fear.