In the British Museum, London, is to be seen the only copy of the poems of Tibbie Pagan, the Muirkirk poetess, of which the writer is aware. There is not a copy in the Scottish National Library in Edinburgh. Some people, indeed, did not believe that such a book every existed, but on a recent visit to London I had a look over the volume. It is a small thin book, bound partly in leather, and extends to 76 pages. Title page:—

A COLLECTION of SONGS AND POEMS ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS BY ISABEL PAGAN

But a’ the whole tract of my time, I found myself inclin’d to rhyme; When I see merry company, I sing a song with mirth and glee

Glasgow:
Printed by Niven, Napier, & Khull, Trongate.

1803


The second poem is

ON BURNS AND RAMSAY Now Burns and Ramsay both are dead, Although I cannot them succeed; Yet here I’ll try my natural skill, And hope you will not take it ill. You know their learning was not sma’, And mine is next to nae at a’; Theirs must be brighter far than mine, Because I’m much on the decline. I hope the public will excuse What I have done here by my Muse, As different men are of different minds, My metre is of different kinds.

The last verse of “The Putting Begins” runs—

My name is Pagan, I lived at Muir-mill, My learning’s so weak, how can I speak with skill? But yet I take pleasure these verses to sing, Success to the hunting, and God save the King.

MUIRKIRK LIGHT WEIGHTS

In Muirkirk there lives a tailor, He scrimpit weight for greed of siller; He scrimpit weight, he counts not fair, Till he’s made three hundred pounds and mare.

The oldest dealer he did say, What will be said at the last day? The tailor said, ne’er mind the last, If we can but make money fast, There will be large allowance gaun For every dealer in the land.

THE SPINNING WHEEL

When I sit at my spinning wheel, And think on every station, I think I’m happiest mysel’ At my small occupation. No court, no freet, or dark debate Can e’er attend my dwelling, While I make cloth of different sorts, Which is an honest calling.

Indeed you know the nights are long, And sometimes I do weary, But, as they’ll shortly turn again, I hope I’ll grow more cheery. I’ll sing a song with noble glee, And tune that I think canty; But I sing best, it is no jest, When the tobacco’s plenty.

I live content, I pay no rent, In my quiet habitation, For B———e he did order it, Which shows his great discretion, To favour one so low as me While I was no relation; But now he’s dead and in the clay I hope he’s won the blessing.

M’A———m brave, agrees to this Kind, honest disposition, He’s charitable, just, and true, Not like most men of fashion. I have no reason here to fret That I was never married, Since I a free possession get O freedom I’m not worried.

For when around me I do look And see the merchants dealing, For they do triple profit take For everything they’re selling; For honesty is grown so weak, It is so old a fashion, Tis not regarded in our day— Tis scarce throughout the nation. Kind Providences sent a good crop, For to support our nation, But Satan’s crew sent it abroad, Which is a sad vexation,
That ere such blackguard vagabonds
Should have a habitation
Below our British government,
That takes this occupation.

A NEW SONG
Although I have no company
Yet cheerfully I'll sing,
I hope M'———m will win the plea,
Good news to us to bring.
The work it has been dull this while,
But now its got a turn,
Weel may he prosper in his way,
Long may his tar kilns burn.

Chorus
Rejoice, ye colliers, all rejoice,
Cheer up your hearts to sing,
The fine appearance of the coal
To us great honour bring.

Although the colliers they rejoice,
The merchants they may mourn,
They'll get their cash at twa week's end,
Which is a clever turn.

For money is better than company's lines,
By which men are oppressed,
If you get your money in your hand
You'll war't as you think best.

Rejoice, etc.

The foregoing are a few of the efforts in
the booklet. Is it not passing strange that what
are considered by repute two of Tibbie's best
poems—"Ca' the Yowes tae the Knowes," and "The Crook and Plaid," are not men-
tioned in the volume? The former is in all
editions of Burns' poems. There are two
versions, but both versions have the same
chorus—

Ca' the yowes to the knowes,
Ca' them where the heather grows,
Ca' them where the burnie rows,
My bonie dearie.

The first stanza of one runs—
As I gaed doon the water-side,
There I met my shepherd lad;
He row'd me sweetly in his plaid,
An' ca'd me his dearie.

With regard to this version the Masonic
Edition of Burns has this note—"The original
of this is generally attributed to Isabel or
Tibbie Pagan, a singular character, who died
in the neighbourhood of Muirkirk, Ayrshire,
in 1821, aged eighty. The poet, curiously,
appears not to have known of Tibbie. Mrs
Burns was fond of singing the song, and used
to point out that the second verse—"Will ye
gang doon the waterside," and also the clos-
ing one were wholly her husband's own.
Writing to Thomson, Burns says—"When I
gave it to Johnston I added some stanza to the
song and mended others."

The first stanza of the other version is—

Hark the mavis' e'ening sang
Sounding Clouden's woods amang;
Then a-faulding let us gang
My bonie dearie.

In connection with this version the note has
it—"Written for Thomson in 1794, this is the
second song on the same subject, and the
genuine Burns every line."

Now, Tibbie says "Burns and Ramsay
both are dead." Can anyone hazard an opin-
ion why at least "Ca' the Yowes" is not in
Tibbie's volume? It is not under any other
title.

A few weeks ago we gave a short resume
of Tibbie Pagan's book, "A Collection of
Songs and Poems on Several Occasions,"
which evoked much interest, and it is per-
haps right that any first-hand information
with regard to this local poetess and contem-
porary of Burns should be put on record.

It is not such a far cry to Tibbie Pagan's
time after all, and we are sure it is not com-
mon knowledge that the mother of the late
Mr John Hodge, Sen., of the Baird Institute,
and the late Mr James M. Hodge of Furnace
Road (Mrs George Hodge, née Leizie
McEwan) was as a girl Tibbie's constant
companion while she was at home in her
cottage by the Garpel Water. The informa-
tion here given was communicated from the
lips of Mrs Hodge (or Granny Hodge as she
was familiarly called in her later years) to the
present generation of relatives. Granny
Hodge's parents resided in the Coutburn Row,
a little beyond Springhill on the Sanquhar
Road.

For a living Tibbie went about the herd's
houses in the Muirkirk, Kirkconnel,
and Sanquhar districts doing a week's sewing,
darning, knitting, or nursing as required,
while she was the star turn at rockings with
her songs and stories. (A rocking was a
friendly visit in which neighbours met dur-
ing the moonlight nights of winter and spring,
and spent the evening alternately in one
another's houses). In winter, when snow or
other circumstances prevented her visiting
the herds, she spun wool for them. Naturally
she came a lot about the home of Granny
Hodge's people.

In her later years Granny Hodge had a little
shop, and sold brown robin, treacle ale, bis-
cuits, etc., and when the treacle ale bottles
plunked they own accord, the boys (espe-
cially her relations) were ready and willing to
assist with the disappearance of the luxury,
and who knows but that they also assisted
with the spontaneous (?) plunking!