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ST. MARY'S FAIR,
AND OTHER POEMS.
BY JAMES T. CALDER.



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James Maitland



To,

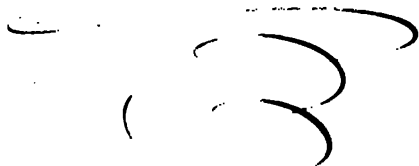
Mr. Mac Phail,

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with the Authors compliments.

John P. Greats

Oct. 12th 1878



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ST. MARY'S FAIR,

AND

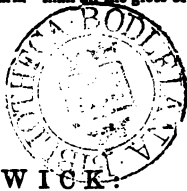
OTHER POEMS,

BY JAMES T. CALDER,

AUTHOR OF "THE SOLDIER'S BRIDE," "SKETCHES
FROM JOHN O'GROAT'S," &c.

To me more dear—congenial to my heart—
One native charm—than all the gloss of art.

Goldsmith.



PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR, BY P. REID,

AND SOLD BY HIM, AND BY W. RAE, WICK; MISS RUSSELL,
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1849.

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P R E F A C E.

IN the two longest Poems of this small volume, the Author has endeavoured to describe the principal scenes of a once celebrated Fair, and a rustic Wedding in Caithness, before the march of modern refinement had effected any great change in the social habits and customs of the peasantry in the County. These pieces, therefore, may be considered as a record of past manners; and, in this view, independently of any literary merit, it is hoped that they will possess some interest to those who love to contemplate human nature under all its varied aspects and modifications. Should it be objected by the fastidious critic that the subject of neither of the effusions is sufficiently *dignified*, the Author would merely say, in the words of a celebrated dramatic writer of antiquity—"Homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto."

John O'Groat's, January, 1849.

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ST. MARY'S FAIR;

OR

THE HUMOURS OF THE MARYMASS IN THE OLDEN TIME.

Jockey's awa to the Fair.—Old Song.

I.

Muse of the laughing eye and comic vein,
Who didst inspire the Bard of "Anster Fair,"
To sing its mirthful frolics in a strain,
So quaint and humourous beyond compare,
Grant me, an humble suitor in thy train,
From the "Far North," with landscape bleak and bare,
One spark, at least, of that celestial fire,
Which glows so bright in Tennant's classic lyre.

II.

Although, no doubt, at times a little dry,
I ask no draught of Hippocrene from thee,
Whose precious fount, beneath the Grecian sky,
So full of inspiration's said to be,
Contented quite, my charming nymph, if I
Can get a cup of Mocha or Bohea,
And, now and then, a glass of generous wine,
Which is a beverage every way divine.

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III.

That is to say, when you can get it good,
Which is but seldom in our British isle,
Without adulteration of logwood
And other mixtures villanous and vile—
Which in the system generate a brood
Of ailments without number—such as bile,
Blue-devils, headache, nausea, indigestion—
All most distressing evils beyond question.

IV.

Nay, so inventive are folk now-a-days,
And godly too—I do not mean to flatter—
That you can rarely to your lips upraise
A drop of whisky that's not spoilt with water,
Or burning hot with vitriol, which plays
Dence with the stomach—a most serious matter ;
But, from our present subject of narration,
This—though quite true—is rather a digression.

V.

It is the morning of the Dunnet Fair,
The kingly sun hath risen an hour ago,
In best of spirits with a gracious air,
No cloud of anger passing o'er his brow ;
His best gold crown is on—as if he were
Resolved this day his brightest face to shew,
And smile upon the gay and busy scene,
That soon will spread along the “Marymass Green.”

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There's scarce a breath of wind on land or sea,
To raffle Autumn's robe of varied dye ;
The chimney-smoke up-curling, light and free,
In silvery column mounts towards the sky ;
While like a living thing with voice of glee,
The crystal mountain brook runs gurgling by ;
And, all the wide and sunny landscape round,
Joy seems to mingle with each sight and sound.

VII.

Clapping his glossy pinions, Chanticleer,
In answer to his distant brother, crows
A note of bold defiance—loud and clear—
Then like a gallant gentleman that knows
His duty is to serve the ladies dear—
Proud of his harem, we may well suppose,
He scrapes the dunghill, furiously and fast,
And chuckling, calls his wives to their repast.

VIII.

Clustered along the cottage roof and eaves,
Their loudly twittering song the starlings raise ;
And from the elder's close embowering leaves,
The robin and the linnet tune their lays ;
Gabble the geese—and make for—greedy thieves !
The corn fast ripening in the solar rays ;
While hissing with stretched neck, the valiant gander
Attacketh man and beast that near him wander.

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IX.

Amid the dewy flower-enameled mead,
Whose odorous breath might charm disease away,
Around its dam that quietly bends to feed,
The lively foal is seen to frisk and play ;
Such happiness does kindly nature breed,
Where'er is felt her mild parental sway,
E'en in dumb beasts, before their spirit's broke
By man's hard usage and oppressive yoke.

X.

The wild bee, too, is out—an early rover,
With her soft fairy trumpet's murmuring sound,
Extracting honey from the fragrant clover,
And the sweet flowers that still are blooming found,
A sign—'tis strange what Instinct doth discover—
No rain to-day will fall upon the ground,
To spoil the lasses' pretty curls and dresses—
A circumstance that greatly would distress us.

XI.

On Dunnet Links our annual fair doth stand,
And strangers from a distance to it hie,
From wild, romantic, heath-clad Sutherland,
Whose lofty mountains swell up to the sky,
And from the stormy Orcades, whose strand
The billows lash with frantic revelry ;
Thither they flock, like pilgrims to some shrine,
Most in the mercantile or droving line.

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XII.

From all directions—north, south, east, and west,
What crowds are making for the Market-Green—
Deck'd in their Sunday clothes—their very best—
In carts, on horseback, and on foot, I ween ;
The Sands* are covered o'er, and, without jest,
The road from Canisbay is choked up clean
With droves of Orkney garrons, staigs, and stots,
And "milkers" of ten pints from John O'Groat's.

XIII.

And buxom country lasses, here and there,
Trip on with cheeks as blooming as the rose ;
Their glossy locks of black or auburn hair,
Set up with combs, or fastened with bandeaus ;—
A few, more stylish than their neighbours, wear
A muslin cap—for, as the reader knows,
Fine Leghorn bonnets, gumflowers, and so forth,
Were, then-a-days, unheard of in the North.

XIV.

They all have on their best print gowns to-day,
Tied with a flashy ribbon round the waist ;
And from their necks they prettily display
Two ample strings of coloured beads at least ;
White worsted stockings on their feet have they,
And shoes—small-toed and creaking—made to taste,—
And thus equipped, with Love's most killing darts,
They'll make sad havoc 'mong the young lads' hearts.

* The Sands of Dunnet—upwards of 2½ miles long.

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XV.

Yonder, *en croupe*, behind her spouse, doth ride
His gaucy helpmate, on a big grey mare,
Their eldest callan trotting by their side,
Full of his new-made jacket and the Fair ;
There walk a buckish bridegroom and his brido—
Linked arm in arm—a very loving pair ;
And there they come who fight our Gallic foes,
The soldiers—with plumed bonnet, kilt, and hose.

XVI.

Among the crowd, so picturesque to view,
A band of ragged tinkers jog along,
With features of the gipsy caste and hue,
As arrant thieves as ere from gallows swung ;
The wives, with eyes from drunken squabbles blue,
Bear on their backs their youngest urchins along ;—
Laden with tin, before them steps a cuddy—
The whole well worthy of a Wilkie's study.

XVII.

Tents beyond tents extend along the ground,
And to the eye present a goodly sight,
Their roofs and sides securely covered round
With good Scotch blankets—not exceeding white :
In all of these the best home-brewed is found,
And genuine smuggled whisky, gleaming bright,
And heaps of bread and cheese, and cold boiled fish,
That make for hungry folk a welcome dish.

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XVIII.

Along the bottom of the Market-green,
And near the road that leads towards the sand,
Two goodly rows of merchant booths are seen,
With showy brows to tempt you on each hand.
Some of the merchants are from Aberdeen,—
From Moray some—a shrewd and canny band ;
For shopkeepers, in Caithness *then*, I trow,
Were not so plentiful as they are *now*.

XIX.

This is by far the gayest sight among
The various interesting scenes and shows,
Our Fair displays ; here, crowds of matrons throng,
And scores of pretty lasses with their beaux,—
So that you can't get easily along,
Especially if you have corny toes,
Which may be trod on by some awkward lout,
Whose mother knows quite well that he is out.

XX.

Besides the merchant "stans," with coaxing air,
Here sit the "sweetie wives" from Thurso town,
With well stored baskets selling "market-fare,"—
Namely, nice cakes of ginger-bread so brown,
And sweeties nicer still, you are aware,
And barley-sugar, tempting, I must own,
And "gundy," too, which youngsters love so well,—
All these and more our female hucksters sell.

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XXI.

Some of them, too, have got for sale, you see,
A choice assortment of the nicest toys,
All manufactured quite ingeniously,
For the behoof of little girls and boys ;
Here you have dolls as fine as dolls can be,—
Rattles and penny-whistles, to make noise,—
And dogs and horses of superior beauty,
For which our young friends pay no tax nor duty.

XXII.

And here's a Gardener, with a rich display
Of most inviting currants—red and black,
And juicy gooseberries in ripe array,
That make the purchaser his lips to smack ;
And Strasburg onions—worthy of a lay—
Which country wives in buying are not slack ;
And splendid crimson carrots, of a size
That would do credit even to southern skies.

XXIII.

There goes a rustic Highlander from Tongue—
A sinewy, long-faced, and ill-favoured wight,
Equipped with tartan philibeg and “rung,”
Who selleth “rashes,” nicely peeled and white ;
These are for cottage lamps, that still are hung
Along the sooty brace, or wall, at night,
When lasses ply the wheel, with birring din,
And lads, on courting bent, “come dropping in.”

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Exalted on a cart, above the crowd,
 A chapman here is selling off his pack,
 And ever and anon he bawls aloud,
 And puffs his wares with all a pedlar's tact ;
 Fine shawls, of Paisley manufacture proud,
 And best broad cloth—would grace a Bailie's back ;
 All these he offers to the rustic throng,
 And, as the sly rogue tells them, "for a song."

XXV.

In good Kilmarnock, shading his rough locks,
 Sky-blue short coat and breeches of "black-greys,"
 And scarlet waistcoat of a length that mocks
 The dandy vests of these degenerate days,
 Here stands "Clay John ;"* dulse fresh from off the rocks
 In well-heaped creel he plenteously displays,
 And oft he asks each "bonny lad and lass"
 To buy some handfuls of it, as they pass.

XXVI.

Behind the tents along the daisied green,
 That smooth as velvet to the North doth spread,
 Some scores of lads and boys—a novel scene—
 Are very busy breaking ginger-bread ;¹
This cake, with glue as if it baked had been,
 Defies a stroke that would have split your head,
 While at the first blow *that* is seen to break,
 And so the owner forfeits all his cake.

* John was a well-known character, who went regularly through the adjoining parishes, disposing of his dulse for meal ; and so large was his organ of acquisitiveness, that he paid no regard whatever to the Eighth Command of the Decalogue.

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XXVII.

But here's a Show that *takes* in every place—
Punch and his wife, the comic-looking pair ;
At first the two most lovingly embrace,
But soon dispute—a thing in life not rare ;
Punch fells the shrew—a most atrocious case—
And hanged must be ; but in the noose's snare
He hooks Jack Ketch himself ; when up starts Nick,
And lags Punch with him and his murderous stick.

XXVIII.

A country bumpkin here his luck will try
At "loop the garter"² with a dexterous rogue ;
He wins two shillings—and triumphantly
He stakes a crown, and *loses* it, poor dog !
But he that bears the "lucky bag" comes by,
And bawls aloud in an outlandish brogue,
"Here's for you, here's the lottery that entices,
Tickets a penny each, *no blanks*—ALL PRIZES !"

XXIX.

'Tis two o'clock ; and yet, from all sides round,
Cattle and folk are thronging to the Fair ;
'Tis worth one's while to note each sight and sound,
Cows lowing here, and horses neighing there ;
Close by the rabbits burrowing under ground,
Skip from their holes to snuff the caller air,
And back again they scud along the green,
Wondering what all this crowd and noise can mean.

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The lads to-day their purses do not spare,
 But treat the lasses well, it must be said,
 Filling their pockets—pockets *then* there were—
 With sweeties, peppermints, and ginger-bread ;
 Here is a clown who buys, as market-fare,
 To give his sweetheart whom he means to wed,
 A penny worth of *onions*—to improve
 The fragrant breath of his dear lady love.

XXXI.

That's Babylon's* whisky tent from which you hear
 The Highland bagpipe play the "Brig of Perth ;"
 How the wild music thrills upon the ear,
 Telling us proudly of its mountain birth ;
 'Tis Babylon's self that plays so true and clear,
 The notes leap out in their delirious mirth,
 Making the very air to ring with gladness,
 And driving from the heart all thoughts of sadness.

XXXII.

We'll take a glance now at the "Upper Green,"
 Where placed for sale the cows and horses stand ;
 Here knots of Caithness "coupers" may be seen
 Bustling among their "bestial," whip in hand—
 A more acute and knowing set, I ween,
 Is not 'twixt this and Berwick's border strand ;
 In suppleness and quirk they all excel,
 As honest *Munsie* to his cost can tell.

* Not the real name of the piper, but an hereditary patronymic or sobriquet.

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XXXIII.

That's Will the Drover, in the drab top coat,
Buying a beast from tricky Tam of Bower ;
"Three pounds," says Will, "I'll gie ye for the stot."
"Na, na," quoth Tam, "haith, ye maun gie me *four*—
A better mouth, I'll pledge my head, there's not
In a' the Market, should ye search it ower."
"Weel, three pounds ten, and ready cash," says Will ;
"It's done," says Tam ;—they're in to drink their gill.

XXXIV.

'Tis now the throngest time of all the Fair,
The day continues beautiful and sunny,
And country folks are busy, everywhere,
Selling and purchasing for ready money ;
Among the motely crowd are here and there
Some characters original and funny,
Certes, well worthy of a niche in song,
Whom I shall point out as we pass along.

XXXV.

Arrived from Davis' Straits but t'other day,
Here comes Bob Slush, with step of naval pride,
A regular sea dandy in his way,
Squirting tobacco juice on every side ;
And sporting *in full rig*, as Jack would say,
Glazed hat, checked shirt, and snow-white trousers wide,
Blue jacket, ear-rings, and a long watch chain,
Down to his knee, of which he seems quite vain.

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XXXVI

'Twas but last March that, in the whaling line,
Slush shipped on board the "Harmony of Hull"—
Yet he has learned to speak the English *fine*.
And blast his eyes and timbers, like John Bull;
In taverns, too, our hero's seen to shine,
And take of grog a very hearty pull;
He thinks himself, 'tis clear, an able seaman,
And much admired, no doubt, by all the women.

XXXVII.

How he will talk—his sweetheart sitting by—
Of his adventures in the polar seas,—
Whales he's harpooned 'neath Greenland's stormy sky,
Whose tails would split a seventy-four with ease;
And he's seen icebergs—he would scorn to lie—
As large as Stroma, floating 'fore the breeze—
White bears, and heathen natives in canoes,
Who live on blubber, sealchies, and sea-mews.

XXXVIII.

But here comes Springy—"two sheets in the wind,"
A man of varied talents known to fame,
A Doctor and a Dominic combined,
Who cures all troubles that afflict our frame;
Rheumatics, coughs, and sores of every kind—
But, chief as a phlebotomist, his name
Is spread for miles around, o'er field and flood,
Hence old and young flock to him to "let blood."

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XXXXX.

He was a soldier in his younger days,
Though he did not much foreign service see,
And in the army 'twas—so rumour says—
He studied physie and took his degree ;
There, too, our Doctor Hornbook learned to raise
His little finger, and enjoy a spree ;
Nine pounds of pension has he in the year,—
His school fees don't add much to it, I fear.

XL.

He wears a round hat and a light brown coat,
A little man below the common size,—
But one among a thousand you would note,
With longish face, large nose, and hawk-like eyes :
A written roup-bill in his hand he's got,
Which through the fair he means to advertise,
A thing he often does—the more's the pity—
Just for a glass or two of *aqua vitæ*.

XLI.

There's Begg, his brother pensioner—all know him—
As brave a soul as ever fought on foot,
Who, in the isle of Java, lost a limb,
For which he's got a wooden substitute,
Made of good solid ash, not slight or slim—
And not requiring either shoe or boot ;
In his right hand he carries a stout stick,
And stumps, right fearlessly, through thin and thick.

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Like other pensioners—whether old or young—

Begg dearly loves a glass of mountain dew,
And over it, for days, with licensed tongue,

He'll talk of all the scenes that he's gone through,
(Such scenes before were never seen or sung,)

Including all the Frenchmen that he slew,
In bloody fight, nor ever once turned tail,
While bullets round him flew like showers of hail.

XLIII.

He was a private in the Ross-shire Buffs,

And might have been a serjeant had he chose !

And in his redcoat, with its yellow cuffs,

Bonnet and feathers, plaided kilt and hose,
A cleaner-looking soldier, though he snuffs,

Was not in all the corps, as Forbes* knows ;
And he'd a leg, ere it received a ball,
Plague take the French ! which charmed the ladies all.

XLIV.

Altho' he's seen some forty summers now,

Still in his breast the martial flame burns bright ;

And well he loves to witness a good row,

And wield his cudgel in a rustic fight ;

His good Glengarry bonnet on his brow,

And back supported by a wall, our wight

Will deal about him lustily his blows,

And put to flight a very host of foes.

* Another pensioner, and trusty bottle companion.

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XLV.

Do'st see that old man, stepping on before,
 Meagre and lank? That's Sanders Gullemwell;
A noted war'lock, versed in fairy lore,
 And every sort of necromantic spell:—
Cattle he cures, that elves have wounded sore,
 And, by the aid of second sight, can tell
Where property that's stolen may be found,
Though hid, with greatest care, for miles around.

XLVI.

He'll bring you back, too, any hapless wight,
 "The "Fairy folk" have spirited away
To their abodes, where all, though dazzling bright
 And beautiful, is but a false display;
Milk, too, that's witch'd, and ropy to the sight,
 He can make good as 'twas at first, they say;
In short, Old Sanders has a deal of knowledge,
Though mostly all acquired in Satan's college.

XLVII.

There's Robbie Bighouse, begging a bawbee,
 A famous vagrant of the pauper corps,
Who with his caustic wit and repartee,
 Oft keeps the peasant's fireside in a roar—
Dressed in a long, black, cast-off coat is he,
 Which late a decent Thurso Bailie wore—
As strange a compound of wit, rogue, and fool,
As ever was produced in Nature's school.

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XLVIII.

But, hark ! with pipe and drum, and glancing brand,
Long ribbons streaming from their bonnets gay,
A party of the Watch*—that gallant band—
Come beating through the fair in proud array :
Close in the rear of this " procession grand,"
Are troops of urchins, happy all to-day,—
While cows and horses startle at the noise,
Made by the martial music and the boys.

XLIX.

The party halt ; and now they form a ring,
Near where yon tent with bunch of heath is seen ;
The pipes bang up, and lo ! with bound and fling,
The merry soldiers foot it on the green ;
King George's health is drunk—the echoes ring—
The crowd around admire the enlivening scene—
And here and there some youngster seems half willing
T' enlist at once, and take King George's shilling.

L.

Here dance two lads who joined the " Watch" to-day,
The one a tailor to his occupation,
Who leaves a young wench in the family-way,
And recently was summoned to the Session ;
The other is a weaver, who, they say,
Has to the soldiers gone from pure vexation—
Because his sweetheart—growing rather saucy—
Refused to take him—the hard-hearted lassie !

* The 42nd Royal Highlanders.

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But, see yon decent matron standing near,
With all a mother's fondness in her breast,
Who seems, poor woman, overwhelmed with fear,
Lest her wild scape-grace of a son should list ;
He is her favourite son, it would appear ;
('Tis strange these scamps their mothers still love best) ;
And much she cautions him with word and glance,
With these " vile red-coats not to drink or dance ! "

LII.

A strapping red haired damsel, Betty Gray,
For modesty not very much renowned,
Is dancing with the military gay ;
When, all at once, through some unlucky bound,
The fastening of her petticoat gives way,
And down it drops directly on the ground ;
On seeing which a roar of laughter loud
Bursts from the roguish soldiers and the crowd.

LIII.

But, hush ! the sergeant is to make a speech ;
" Now, my young lads, if any of you here
Desire the rank of officers to reach,
Glory acquire, and live on best of cheer,
Now is your time, by Jove, and I beseech
All of you strongly, as a friend sincere,
Your chain of rustic slavery to break,
And, loyally, King George's shilling take.

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LIV.

As soldiers you'll have little else to do
But go like gentlemen, from day to day,
Clean shaved, in scarlet regimentals new,
Kiss all the pretty girls, and draw your pay ;
Why then should brave, young, able chaps like you,
In toil and drudgery pass your days away ?
So now's the time embrace the fit occasion."
Here Sergeant Gunn concluded his oration.

LV.

But, hark ! there has occurred a desperate row,
A thing that often happens here, I wot ;
The fair is all one perfect hubbub now,
And old and young are running to the spot ;
Two rival lads, called Mucklejohn and Gow,
Have quarrelled 'bout a lassie, Peggy Groat—
And, fired with love and drink together, they
Must try the hardness of their skulls to-day.

LVI.

Friends and acquaintances the parties aid,
And now the affair becomes a general fight,
Some scores of cudgels rattle—blood is shed—
And here and there some poor unlucky wight,
Stretched at his length upon the sward is laid,
Nigh felled to death (a truly piteous sight) ;
While horrid oaths on all sides shock the ear,
And piercing shrieks from females crying near.

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LVII.

There are no officers of the police,
 With handcuffs from their pockets peeping out,
 To seize on these disturbers of the peace,—
 So let them deal their savage blows about ;
 The broken heads and bruises will increase
 The Doctor's fees and practice, I've no doubt—
 Nor should I wonder if the rustic fray
 Should put some shillings in the Lawyers' way.

LVIII.

Brave hearted, merry England, joy to thee !
 Land of roast beef, plum-pudding, and fair-play,
 Such vulgar, shameful fights, thou ne'er dost see,
 As have been witnessed in our fair to-day ;
 Thy manly well-fed sons, so frank and free,
 Wield not vile "rungs"—in this Hibernian way ;
 But with their well trained fists, each other *pound*—
 Their friends in seemly circle standing round.

LIX.

Now, every where the whisky booths are seen,
 Crowded with dealers to the very door,
 Drinking their "feetales,"* and discussing keen
 Their beasts' good parts—(such beasts were ne'er before)—
 And lads are here ; and lasses, whose bright een
 And blushing cheeks, a painter would adore,—
 All getting happy, talkative, and frisky—
 Some quaffing ale, and others quaffing whisky.

* Treats of liquor after bargains are concluded.

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LX.

Those were the golden days on sea and land,
When total abstinence was quite unknown,
When famed John Barleycorn—the wizard grand,
Sat, like a merry despot, on his throne,
And high and low owned his imperial wand—
(His kingly rights disputed yet by none)
When even the clergy, loving all as brothers,
Took, now and then, a hearty glass like others.

LXI.

But eve draws on ; and Phœbus, who, all day,
Shone on the fair with countenance so bright,
Makes, at his exit, a superb display,
And from his golden chariot smiles good night :
Touched with the lustre of his parting ray,
The fields are glowing with a yellow light ;
And, list ! the lark, mistaking it for Spring,
Warbles a few brief notes on quivering wing.

LXII.

Forth comes the glad round Moon—and yonder beams
Eve's beauteous planet, with her radiant eye—
The youthful lovers' favourite star it seems,
Of all those twinkling myriads of the sky,—
Soft thoughts inspiring, and romantic dreams ;
So say the poets every one—though I
Shrewdly suspect 'tis all imagination,
And, like Platonic love, without foundation.

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LXIII.

The roads are thronged, as far as you can see,
With people trudging homeward from the fair,
All primed with drink, jocose, and full of glee,
As if there was not such a thing as care ;—
Here one on legs too supple 'bout the knee,
Staggers along with very sapient air,—
And there a madcap gallops at full speed,
To shew the swiftness of a favourite steed.

LXIV.

But look ! here's Elder George, with quantum suff.,
Led by his wife who scolds him all the way,
His nose and upper lip besmeared with snuff,
His happy visage flushed with usquebaugh ;
A good old boy who hates to cant or puff,
But with a crony likes to " wet his clay ;"
I hope his brother Elders of the Session
Will overlook, for once, this small transgression.

LXV.

Ere all these worthies reach their own fireside,
A few, no doubt, will ticklish sights behold,
For in the ghostly moonlight streaming wide,
The fairies will be dancing on the wold,
And on the smooth sand by the ocean tide ;
Such revels were quite common then, we're told ;
But heaven forfend ! these wily imps to-night
Should whisk away with them some tipsy wight.

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LXVI.

For should he join them in their sprightly dance,
And quaff their drink, which witches o'er the main
Fetched from the cellars of the king of France,
His doom is fixed—he follows in their train;
Nor has the poor deluded fool a chance
Of e'er returning to his friends again,
Unless some seer that's versed in lore of hell,
Work his deliverance through a potent spell.

LXVII.

And now, my Muse, before we start for home,
We'll, if you please, just enter "Clairdon's Inn,"
And see what's doing in that stately dome;—
Hark to th' increasing bacchanalian din,—
Gill stoups they clatter here, and tankards foam—
Both old and young are in a merry pin;
And, now and then, some bumpkin sings the while—
Though not exactly *in the Wilson style*.

LXVIII.

Here, exercising his poetic vein,
Famed for his ready powers of crambo clink,
Sits Rhyming Benjie—showering round like rain
His wit, accompanied with nod and wink;
Each word you say—so fertile is his brain—
(No doubt enlivened by the power of drink),
With fitting rhyme our rustic genius clenches,
And keeps a-laughing all the lads and wenches.

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LXIX.

But Didlum's* come, whose bow so sweet and strong,
 Electrifies the heels of great and small ;
 So to the barn—we'll not stay very long—
 That's swept and ready for the rustic ball ;
 Thither, in pairs, the lads and lasses throng,
 Leading each other—kind and loving all ;
 And now, to Didlum's strains they bound with glee—
 A very gay and pleasant sight to see.

LXX.

Perched on a barrel, close beside the kiln,
 The fiddler scrapes his instrument with pride,
 Getting, with each bawbee, more vigorous still ;—
 The merry dancers bound from side to side,
 And shout and clap their hands with right good will,
 (The stream of pleasure's at its highest tide ;)
 And now for "Caberfeagh" they bawl amain,
 And now for "Jacky Tar's" enlivening strain.

LXXI.

Two penny candles, stuck in chips of wood,
 Along the barn their dingy lustre throw ;
 Nathless the dancers thrash, in joyous mood,
 The old clay floor, not over smooth below,
 And ever, as the inspiring reels conclude,
 Some lass a hearty smack gets from her joe ;
 For happier they than gentles are, with all
 Their dazzling lustres in some gorgeous hall.

* "Didlum" became a great religious professor afterwards, and looking on his fiddle as a profane instrument, he threw it aside altogether.

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LXXII.

Among the dancers comical and rare,
Our friend and military hero, Begg,
Calls for "The Soldier's Joy"—his favourite air,
And *goes it* bravely with his wooden leg;
For toes and heels around he doesn't care,
Nor does he mind the lasses' gowns a fig,
As in the *Polka* style he jumps and capers,
Beneath the sickly melancholy tapers.

LXXIII.

But, 'tis high time, my Muse, that home we go,
Through, doubtless, this is an enticing ball,
But regular hours we must observe, you know,
A thing that sober, decent folk do all;
Besides, a good example we should shew,
To the whole tribe of rhymers—great and small;
So let us start, we need no lantern's light
To guide our steps—it is a splendid night.

LXXIV.

See! from the south the happy harvest moon
Shines brightly down with joy-diffusing look,
Fast ripening with her beam the corn, that soon
Will fall beneath the rustic reaper's hook;
To-night her radiance is a precious boon—
Revealing every moss, and turn, and crook,
To old grey-beards, that homeward bend their way,
Muzzy with drink, imb'ed throughout the day.

www.libtool.com LXXV.

A silver-tissued carpet, passing rich,
Spread for the foot of Lady Luna seems,
With, here and there, a patch of blue, through which
A diamond star, with sparkling lustre, gleams ;—
Skimming along the yellow sandy beach,
The wild curlew, a note of gladness screams,
While Neptune, calmly smiling as he flows,
Hushes his infant billows to repose.

NOTE 1, ST. XXVI.—“ —— breaking ginger-bread.”

A cake seemingly *tough* being purchased, the owner bawled aloud, “What’ll strick at the cake?” until some one tendered a halfpenny or penny, according to the half price of the cake, for one blow of a stick, which was frequently *prepared* for the occasion, by being made sharp on one side, or by having even the blade of an old knife inserted, and kept from view. As a match to this *fraud*, the knowing ones often *prepared* the cakes in various ways, especially by sewing them with worsted thread. When this could not be done, they were almost always lubricated with saliva, which was considered a toughening process. If any portion of the cake broke upon being struck, the owner forfeited the cake; but, if not, and it could be suspended by the four corners, without falling separate, the owner retained it; and cakes frequently held together, after repeated blows. We have seen “The Marymass” become an almost general battle, from an altercation about “sewed cakes,” or sticks with knife blades; and we believe, that on one occasion at least, *broken heads* became a subject of judicial investigation.

NOTE 2, ST. XXVIII.—“Loop the garter” or “prick the loop.”

The manner in which this piece of chicanery was played off was by involving the loops or folds of a long piece of selvedge, of which the owner held both end-, so as to render it difficult for the novice to insert the point of a wooden pin or large bodkin into the middle loop; in most cases the *simple experimenter* found his point outside the loop, and his stake lost.

BIRKIE'S BRIDAL.

Fy, let us a' to the Bridal,
For there will be liltin there.

Old Song.

I.

Muse of the social, mirth-inspiring face,
Who dost o'er festive scenes thy spirit fling,
Once more I ask thy countenance and grace,
While by the Pentland Firth, I strive to sing
In truthful verse, rejecting fabled story,
A country wedding in its pristine glory.

II.

A merry bridal—such as used to be
At John O'Groat's—in days of "auld lang syne,"
Ere steam was known, or ships were seen to flee
'Gainst wind and tide, along the azure brine;
Or railway trains went sixty miles an hour—
A sight would make our simple grandsires glower.

III.

When dreary winter comes with chilling eye,
And blustering Boreas like a maniac raves—
Hurling his sleety showers along the sky,
And fiercely stirring up the Pentland waves;
'Tis now, when gloom o'erspreadeth sea and land,
Our lads and lasses link in Hymen's band.

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IV.

'Tis at this season that they pair for life,
For now the harvest and the fishing's o'er,
And herrings and potatoes both are rife,
And sellocks swarm in thousands round the shore ;
So, as our youth find little else worth doing,
They've time enough to smoke and go a-wooing.

V.

Therefore, I think, 'tis wise in them to wed,
And follow up the good old Scripture rule,
Despite what Malthus on the point has said,
And others of that queer newfangled school,
Whose " moral check " looks very like a libel
On Providence itself, as well's the Bible.

VI.

But to our wedding. Our bridegroom's a blade,
Whose match, for many miles, you will not find,
BIRKIE his name—a sutor to his trade,
But quite a genius of the rarest kind,
With fertile brain, still full of scheme and project,
And much renowned for cleverness and *logic*.

VII.

The bride's a beauty—we've but few to spare—
A genuine beauty of the Scottish cast,
With cherry cheeks, blue eyes, and yellow hair,
And skin, like milk, in whiteness unsurpassed—
A clean, well-footed dame of proper size,
That any mortal man might deem a prize.

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At fairs and dancings she was much admired,
And had, of course, a host of rustic beaux,
Who strove about her, when with drink inspired,
And gave each other many cruel blows ;
Each emulous the blooming nymph to gain,
Which made her, you may guess, a little vain.

IX.

There were Jock Reid, the wright, and "Weaver Will,"
Brunty the smith, and "Davie i' the Park,"
And young Braehead, that dearly likes a gill,
And tailor Twist—a very dressy spark,
And Andrew Cock the pilot, and Bob Graham,
With many more I have not time to name.

X.

But gallant Crispin out-manceuvred all
The rival suitors that around her clung ;
For, though his powers as pugilist were small,
He had a matchless talent at the tongue ;
So he, one night, behind the long peat stack,
Got Nell's consent, and sealed it with a smack.

XI.

The banns are published, and the wedding day
Is duly fixed, and every thing is ready,
And Willie Skirlie is engaged to play—
A country piper, popular and steady,
With power of wind, as I have heard it stated,
To keep the sheep-skin bag for weeks inflated.

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XII.

The 'customed feet-washing took place last night,
When all the nearest friends were at the "ploy,"
And they'd a snug bit feast with candle light,
And much the party did themselves enjoy ;
But, dawns the bridal morn, and you'll remember,
A bright one 'tis in month of bleak December.

XIII.

The winter sun shines cheerly from the sky,—
The ground is mantled in a robe of snow,
That crisply glitters to the dazzled eye,
With million sparkling gems—a beauteous show—
Filling the bounding bosom with delight,
Although the keen air feels as it would bite.

XIV.

Behold the marvellous doings of John Frost—
That unseen artist of surpassing powers ;
The very window frame he hath embossed
In fancifullest style, with shrubs and flowers,
Forming a silver tissue, such as ne'er
Came from the fingers of a lady fair.

XV.

And from the cottage eves, in glittering rows,
The frozen icicles depend like spears ;
And as the slanting sunbeam warmer grows,
From every point a crystal drop appears,
Which, slowly melting, trickles on the ground,
Where honest robin redbreast hops around.

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XVI.

The brook that lately ran toward the main
From the brown moorlands, with a gurgling sound,
Lies mute and fettered in an icy chain—
As hard as 'twere a piece of solid ground ;
And noisy urchins, as they wend to school,
Now slide on it and every glassy pool.

XVII.

Diverted with the strangely beauteous show,
The youthful cottage cur, of collie race,
Runs poking with his nose among the snow—
Rolls, shakes himself, and now, in playful chase,
Attacks the fowls, that from the barn door hurry,
All loudly screaming in a dreadful flurry.

XVIII.

But I digress—so to our bridal tale—
Our guests have met and breakfasted, I find,
On buttered fish, eggs, scones, oat cakes, and ale—
(No tea or flummery there of any kind)—
And now, before they start, to keep them frisky,
They get a “caulker” each of smuggled whisky.

XIX.

The bride and bridegroom, in their best array,
In separate parties to the altar go—
For they each other must not see to-day,
Until they meet before the priest, you know ;
Such sight would not be lucky, they believe,
And to this creed our vulgar firmly cleave.

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XX.

With her attendants first arrives the bride,
Blushing in beauty like a sweet wild rose ;
Then comes the spruce bridegroom with step of pride,
Followed by his long train of belles and beaux ;
The whole amounting, as in church they meet,
To fourscore pairs, in wedding rig complete.

XXI.

The lasses all, as well's the bride, are dressed
In muslin gowns of spotless white to-day,
Encircled with a ribbon round the waist,
And on their heads, with ribbons also gay,
Nice cambric caps, in newest fashion, swell—
Which quite bewitching make each rustic belle.

XXII

The hymeneal knot at length is tied,
And now the gay procession homeward steer ;
The piper, with his cheeks distended wide,
Bangs up a merry tune, the way to cheer,—
For Willie's music, where no note is missed,
Has charms enow to "soothe the savage breast."

XXIII.

From every cottage door, the old and young,
Brisk serving lads, and buxom smiling lasses,
Throng out with curious eye and critic tongue,
To see the merry bridal as it passes ;
While, here and there, some idle rogue, for fun,
Fires off at them a rusty-barreled gun.

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XXIV.

They've reached the bridal door ; and, in a trice,
Out steps a matron with an oaten cake, ¹
Stuffed thick with raisins and with "sweeties" nice,
Which o'er the bride's head she proceeds to break ;
When, lo ! a scramble that might cure the *blues*,
To catch the fragments, instantly ensues.

XXV.

For each small crumb the virtue hath, it seems,
When 'neath the pillow, snugly laid at night,
Of blessing youths and maidens with love dreams,
And hours of soft endearment and delight,
In that sweet land, ye'leped the land of nod,
Which Morpheus rules o'er with his magic rod.

XXVI.

Next, entering in, they every one, receive
A brimming glass of genuine usquebae,
In Stroma brewed, without the gauger's leave,
And *cannily* brought o'er the other day,
The real peat-reek stingo, past dispute,
Which warms the inner man from head to foot.

XXVII.

And, certes, all of them, both young and old,
But most the lasses, in their muslin dress,
With noses red as scarlet with the cold,
Need much a drop of liquor, I confess ;
For, all the day it hath not ceased to freeze,
And strong of Greenland, smells the cutting breeze.

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XXVIII.

Along the barn, with forms on either side,
Propped up with stones, two ample benches stretch,
Graced with a linen web—the housewife's pride—
Which by the burn lay many a day to bleach ;
On this the smoking dishes ranged are seen—
A grateful sight to all the guests I ween.

XXIX.

Like two dull planets winking through the haze,
From each end of the barn a lamp doth throw,
Replete with cudden oil, its sickly rays
Around the guests that throng the floor below,
Their countenances beaming bright with joy,
Albeit the lasses lock a little coy.

XXX.

They all are seated ; and the bridegroom now
Whispers the elder, who, with serious face,
Placing his hand across his reverend brow,
Spins out an orthodox and lengthened grace ;
This done, the party, sharp-set with their walk,
The goodly viands lustily attack.

XXXI.

Pork and potatoes are excluded both,
As much too common for our bridal feast,
But there's abundance of good barley broth,
And young stot beef, the fattest and the best,
And dark-complexioned, shore-fed mutton rare,
That smacks, methinks, a little of the ware.

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XXXII.

And there's of potted geese a good supply,
Fed on the stubble field, fine sappy "brods,"*
And plump howtowdies that would charm the eye,
If aught would do it, of the famed Meg Dods—
All richly swimming in a sea of gravy,
Enough to float the Lilliputian navy.

XXXIII.

Nor is there wanting plenty of oatcakes,
Piled up in baskets, worthy of a song—
The good substantial article that makes
The Scottish peasant sinewy and strong,
And fit to labour at his daily toil,
To wield the flail or delve the rugged soil.

XXXIV.

The pewter plates are rather scarce, you see,
But that's a thing they do not seem to mind,
For round the board two guests, and sometimes three,
(Their simple manners not yet grown refined)
In the same plate, all squeamishness defying,
Their ram-horn spoons are vigorously plying.

XXXV.

Though of the banquet the acknowledged lord,
The bustling bridegroom sits not down to eat,
But, with the "best man," waits the festive board,
Hands in each dish, and sees they all have meat;
Such is the custom in our northern clime,
And such it was from immemorial time.

* Brods—in the provincial patois—geese that have gone through the process of incubation, and reared a family.

www.libtool.com.cn XXXVI.

Placed at the upper end—the “sornie”^{*} near—
Between her two best maids the bride doth sit,
But, though there is abundance of good cheer,
The modest bride can scarcely eat a bit ;
Nay, all the pretty lasses, strange to say,
Seem to have lost their appetites to-day.

XXXVII.

Not so the married dames—they wisely do
Full justice to the good things of the feast,
For they to *airs* have long since bid adieu,
Nor, like their daughters, do they feel *strait laced* ;
There's Maggie Mowat, the spouse of Jamie Ham,
Already has devoured a pound of lamb.

XXXVIII.

An honoured guest, the bridal party 'mong,
Here sits the gauger, in a green surtout—
A southern blade, who sings a famous song,
And likes his glass, as gaugers always do ;
Beside him is a young and blooming hussy,
With whom the sly rogue's flirting very busy.

XXXIX.

Of his attention she is clearly proud,
And, coyly smiling, turns her head away,
With cheek that blushes like the morning cloud
Which Phoebus paints with his vermilion ray,
When newly flaming 'bove the eastern hill,
He comes with light and joy the world to fill.

* *Anglice*—the hearth and fire-place of the kiln.

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XL.

Miss Marion Clash, the spinster, you can see,
Is eying her askance with bitter look,
In which affected scorn and jealousy
Are plainly legible, as in a book ;
The damsel's name she'll soon severely handle,
And treat the public to a dish of scandal.

XLI.

Meantime, the "Bride's cog,"² full of best home-brewed—
The reaming swats that Scotia's Bard hath sung—
Nappy and brown, with double strength endued,
Circles the board and looses every tongue ;
And all with great good will, from side to side,
Drink to the happy Bridegroom and the Bride.

XLII.

A sweet milk kebbuck is set down at last,
Their appetites still further to appease,
But they have made so glorious a repast,
They can do little justice to the cheese ;
And, bent on mirth, the lads and lasses all
Are getting anxious for the coming ball.

XLIII.

Now, for the dance. The barn, with cobwebs graced,
Is cleared of forms and boards, without delay,
And, on a high seat by the "sornie" placed,
The piper plants him down and 'gins to play,
And first he skirls up, till the rafters ring,
The appropriate air—"The Bride's a bonny thing."

XLIV.

Enlivened with the music's magic sound,
Quick to their feet the lads and lasses start,
And thrash the earthen floor, and nimbly bound
In comic steps, beyond the reach of art,
Acquired in Nature's own good simple school,
Which ties the limbs not down to square and rule.

XLV.

And certes, 'tis a happy sight to see
Some thirty couples take the floor at once,
And set and cross and fling right joyously,
In one long reel—a real “country dance,”
And oft as Willie strikes up a new strain,
Shout, clap their hands, and set to work again.

XLVI.

And ever and anon, to quench their drouth,
And eke the piper's, when he lulls his drones,
The Bride's cog circles round from mouth to mouth,
With plentiful supply of sowed scones,
The only pan-cakes known at John O'Groat's,
Ere the advent of “Leghorns” and long-coats.

XLVII.

Now for the “White Cockade,”* they shout amain,
When forth steps Peter Rosie from his seat,
And throws a handkerchief on Dolly Bain,
Who with a bashful simper springs to feet ;
Brave Peter kiases Dolly—“nothing loth ;”
Then, hand in hand, a while they trip it both.

* This peculiar dance, now all but forgotten, was performed to the air called “The White Cockade,” and, as may be supposed, was a general favourite with the younger part of the company.

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XLVIII.

The napkin next on Geordie Warse she throws,
Who casts it on his sweetheart Kitty Jack ;
Up Kitty gets—when Geordie, blithe, bestows
On Kitty's rosy lips a hearty smack ;
And thus the cambric handkerchief they fling,
Till all are up and whirling in a ring.

XLIX.

Ye canting bigots of the present time,
Foes to all social jollity and mirth,
Who look on dancing as a sin and crime,
And would have music banished from the earth ;
Ye should be bastinadoed on the soles,
And soused o'er head and ears in quarry holes !

L.

Meantime from out the crowded barn retired,
Snug in the "cellar"* sit the married folks,
And with the nappy, as they get inspired,
Hand round their "sneeshin mills," and crack their jokes ;
And much they talk of "stryth" and make complaints
Of late bad fishings and of heavy rents.

LI.

Their tongues run faster aye the more they drink,
Till, in the end, their eloquence is such,
They gabble all at once, and you would think
The honest drouthy miller's talking Dutch,
Or some outlandish speech, on this occasion,
Which greatly needs, I ween, interpretation.

* The principal apartment in the houses of our peasantry.

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LII.

Mirth reigns in-doors—outside no bonfires blaze,
As when our gentry form the nuptial tie,
But on our bridal, with their brightest rays,
The stars, in thousands, sparkle from the sky ;
And from yon Skerry,* where strong currents muster,
The Pentland lights flash out with double lustre.

LIII.

And from their home, beyond the Polar Sea,
The "Merry Dancers," too, are out to-night,
And foot it on the floor of heaven with glee,
Showering around their rainbow-coloured light,
Up, up the welkin's azure brow to where,
Beside the North Pole stands the guardian Bear.

LIV.

And, hark ! methinks as they too did rejoice,
Old Neptune's billows round the star-lit shore
Now faintly swell, and now upraise their voice
Like bacchanals in one loud thundering roar ;
But it is twelve o'clock, and our young pair
Must shortly to their bridal couch repair.

LV.

And first the Bride is to her chamber led ;
Nor need we wonder that, with hopes and fears,
At this peculiar moment she should shed—
'Tis quite in nature—a few transient tears ;
But, to cheer up her heart, in Birkie stumps,
And, quick undressing, down beside her plumps.

* The islet on which the "Pentland Skerries" Lighthouse is erected.

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LVI.

Meantime the room is crammed unto the door,
 With lads and lasses on each other pressed ;
 The stockings thrown, and now the cog once more
 Circles around 'mid rustic mirth and jest,
 And both the Bride and Bridegroom must sit up
 And pledge the party in a final cup.

LVII.

The happy pair are left to their repose ;
 And to the barn anew the guests adjourn,
 And dance till chanticleer his summons crows,
 And lighted household fires begin to burn ;
 When to their several homes they all withdraw,
 Through plashy roads, amidst a drizzling thaw.

NOTE 1, St. XXIV.—“ Out steps a matron with an oaten cake.”

The ceremony of breaking the Bride's Cake has, within these few years, fallen into desultude. The individual who performed it behaved to be a married woman, and the nearest female relative of the bridegroom. The cake, like the “farls” in Burn's “Holy Fair,” was baked with butter, and further enriched with raisins and “sweeties.” The ceremony always took place out of doors. On the arrival of the company from the church or manse, the relative in question met them, in the close, with the cake, which was sometimes partially broken before hand, wrapt in a towel, and holding it above the Bride's head, she gave it a stroke with her hand, and then shook the contents from the towel among the wedding party. This was followed by a laughable scramble among the lads and lasses, who pressed and struggled about the Bride to catch the falling fragments, being all exceedingly anxious to secure a piece of the cake, from its reputed efficacy in suggesting love dreams. Of course, the driest and cleanest spot before the house was chosen for the exhibition of this interesting observance. The cake is now brought in and distributed in small portions to the guests after dinner.

NOTE, 2, St. XLI.—“ Meantime the bride's cog full of best home brewed.”

The Bride's Cog, now totally disused, was a large wooden vessel, with two handles, made expressly for the purpose, out of which the wedding ale was drunk. It usually held from three to four Scotch pints ; and each guest, after taking a draught, handed it to the person next him, and so on, till it went round the whole company.

LADY CAITHNESS
AND THE
MESSENGER FROM FLODDEN.

William, Earl of Caithness, who, with his followers, fell at Flodden in 1613, was at the time under forfeiture. The current tradition is that, before the fatal action commenced, the King, on seeing the Earl advance to his assistance, with such a fine body of men, was so gratified that he immediately wrote out a removal of his forfeiture on a drum head, and forthwith dispatched one of the Earl's soldiers with it to Lady Caithness: so that if anything should befall his Lordship, the family might be secured in their titles and lands. The bearer of this charter, which is said to be still extant, was the only one of the Caithness corps that ever returned.

'Twas a gloomy eve in autumn—
Clouds o'er heaven lay dense and still ;
And the sun no smile shed round him,
As he sank behind the hill.

All without seemed full of sadness—
Not a sound on earth or sky,
Save the wild wave's hollow murmur,
And the seafowl's piercing cry.

In her tapestried princely chamber,
Lonely, uttering not a word,
Pensive sat the Lady Caithness,
Brooding o'er her absent Lord.

For of him she'd heard no tidings,
Since the hour he marched away,
With his sprightly band to England,
Trimly clad in green array.

All the flower of Caithness with him—
Pipe and drum and banner bright—
To assist King James of Scotland,
In the anticipated fight.

With dark fears the Lady's spirit
 Day by day was troubled sore ;
 Something whispered that she never
 Would behold her husband more.

Thrice of late she dreamed she saw him,
 Ghastly bleeding from the fight ;
 And she heard the death-watch beating
 By her bedside yesternight.

As she sat and pondered, leaning
 With her pale cheek on her hand,
 She was told a youth would see her,
 Newly come from England's strand.

From her reverie she started,
 While her frame convulsive shook ;
 Hope and fear, in anxious struggle,
 Deeply blended in her look.

"Bring the stranger hither," said she
 To her trusty Seneschal ;
 And, with graceful bow, a soldier
 Slowly stepped into the hall.

But, no sooner had he entered,
 Travel-sore, with weary pace,
 Than she read the dismal tidings
 In the expression of his face.

"Speak, brave soldier," said the Lady,
 While her cheek grew ghastly white,
 "Bring'st thou not unto my castle
 Heavy news for me to-night ?

Oh ! for pity's sake, conceal nought—
 Tell me quickly all you know ;
 By your look I guess too truly
 That my gallant Lord lies low.

Though your tale must rend my bosom,
I have strength to bear it all ;
Heaven will not forsake the widow,
In her lone deserted hall."

Then the youthful Highland soldier
Painfully looked up to speak,
While the teardrop, like a woman's,
Trickled down his manly cheek,

" Sad the tale, indeed, my Lady—
Wounds there are can ne'er be healed ;
King and Nobles all have perished,
On dark Flodden's bloody field.

And, alas ! my honoured chieftain
There too lies among the slain,
With his followers all around him,
Ne'er to cross the Ord again.

I alone, the sole survivor
Of our brave lamented band,
Bear thee home this precious charter,
Written with the royal hand.

It restores thee all thy titles,
Every privilege and right ;
'Twas the last deed of the monarch,
Ere the trumpet blew to fight."

" Worthless now to me and empty,"
Said the Lady with a sigh,
" All the rank the world can give me—
All the honours 'neath the sky."

Then withdrawing from the chamber,
Whelmed in sorrow passing deep,
*To her widowed couch she hurried,
There in solitude to weep.*

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THE MAIDEN OF NORWAY.

Alexander III. of Scotland having died in 1286 without any lineal male descendant, Margaret of Norway, called by historians the Maiden of Norway, became the legitimate successor to the throne. It was proposed to effect a union of the British crowns, by a marriage between her and Edward Prince of Wales, son of Edward I. of England; but the young princess fell sick on her passage to Scotland, and died in Orkney.

The evening sunshine rests on Drontheim bay,
Where, newly moored, a stately ship doth ride,
And from her lofty mizen-mast display
Her nation's ensign o'er the swelling tide ;
'Tis Scotland's lion, with majestic mien,
That proudly rampant on that flag is seen.

To Norway's ancient court that vessel brings
Two gallant belted knights of high repute,
Skilled to preside in cabinets of kings,
Charged with a deeply-interesting suit—
To ask the hand of Erick's daughter fair,
For young Prince Edward, England's royal heir.

Gifted with virgin beauty's richest dower,
The graceful Norway maiden charmed the eye,
In blooming girlhood, like a lovely flower,
That opes its blossom to the sunny sky—
A sweet flower of too delicate a form
To bear the chilling blast and ruthless storm.

Three weeks at court the Scottish chiefs remained,
With other royal guests—a brilliant throng—
And, as became their rank, were entertained
With due magnificence of feast and song ;

Each day the best that Norway could afford
Was heaped profusely on the monarch's board.

Flowed the red wine—and many a beaker bright
Was drained unto the young affianced pair,
Who in one crown should happily unite
Proud, hardy Scotland, and her sister fair,
Frank-hearted England—long such bitter foes—
Well symbolled by the thistle and the rose.

But time flew by—the parting hour was come,
And all was bustle on the vessel's deck :
Amid the scene, with speechless sorrow dumb,
The Princess wept upon her father's neck,
While neither could pronounce the word *farewell*—
That word that soundeth like a funeral knell.

The anchor's up—the sails unfurled—and hark !
Cheers from the crew reply to those from land,
And many a prayer is breathed out for that bark,
That she may safely reach the Scottish strand,
Escaped the perils of the treacherous seas,
Now gently heaving with the summer breeze.

Around the prow the sportive billows leap,
And sparkling rush in silvery foam away ;
Dive the wild fowl, or skim along the deep,
As they enjoyed a special holiday ;
And oft the seal puts up his head to gaze,
And bask, with pleasure, in the solar rays.

Cheered with the freshening breeze the pilot sings,
Looks to the bellying canvass and the skies,
While, like a fleet seabird, with outstretched wings,
High o'er the curling surge the vessel flies ;
But Margaret, like a drooping lily pale,
Sighs in her berth, and sickens in the gale.

At length the lonely Orcades appear,
Emerging slowly from the boiling tide,
And straight for Kirkwall doth the vessel steer,
Where Norway's Princess among strangers died,
Struck down in youth, with all her prospects proud,
Her wedding robe, alas ! an early shroud.

THE WIDOW OF RONA.

'Tis midnight—and the wild December blast
Hath roused the billows of th' Atlantic vast,
That lash with fury—while they lash in vain—
Yon isles that crown the Hebridean main.

Caught in the gale, amid the billowy strife,
A lonely bark is struggling sore for life,
Like one who in a fever groans in pain,
And wildly tosses with disordered brain.
The moon is hid beneath a pall of night,
Dark as the grave, without a gleam of light ;
And fiercer still the savage tempest blows—
For the poor seaman there is no repose ;
Death calls for victims—and no port is nigh,
Where, from surrounding peril, he may fly.
Oh ! that the moon would pierce night's dusky brow,
And kindly shine to guide his dubious prow.
Through the thick darkness and the blinding spray
The eye perceives, at length, a welcome ray,—
A blessed light, that with propitious smile,
Beams from the steepy height of Rona's isle ;

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And flashing out, like hope amid despair,
Invites the wanderer to take shelter there.

'Tis a poor widow, aged and unknown,
Save to the wind-tossed mariner alone,
Who from her lattice hangs that beacon light,
Which burns so brightly there the livelong night ;
For till the day breaks, and the sea-bird stirs,
She ne'er lets out that watchful lamp of hers.

There is on Rona's bleak deserted strand,
A haven of safety formed by nature's hand ;
And thither, guided by the friendly light,
The storm-caught vessel often runs at night,
And in its sheltering port a refuge finds
From raging billows and resistless winds ;
And 'tis the widow's joy, at times like these,
To cheer the drooping pilgrim of the seas ;
For him, be-drenched and shivering from the surf,
She kindles up her brightest fire of turf,
And sets before him, on her humble board,
Such fare as her poor cottage can afford.
All this she does from motives purely kind,
And nature's holiest sympathy of mind ;
Nor will she aught of recompense receive—
Such bliss is hers to comfort and relieve.

She had experienced—heaven had willed it so—
In early life affliction's heaviest blow ;
And still, at times, though bent with seventy years,
The thought will drench her faded cheek with tears.

One stormy eve, when making for the shore,
In their frail skiff, she, from the cottage door,
Beheld, alas ! the husband of her pride—
With her three brothers—perish in the tide.

And, ever since that mournful evening's close,
Her heart has deeply sympathised with those
Who buffet with the billows in their wrath,
And all the perils of that trackless path.

When summer beams around the lonely isle,
And ocean's face is mantled with a smile,
Oft, leaning on her staff, at noon of day,
She to the rugged beach will bend her way,—
And, sitting on a rock, in saddest thought,
Intensely gaze for hours upon the spot
Where she beheld, amid the breakers' roar,
Her spouse and brothers sink to rise no more!

She—by her lamp alone—has saved at night,
Unnumbered lives from shipwreck's dismal plight,
And yet the public gratitude has ne'er
Bestowed the slightest bounty upon her.*
It matters not—within her aged breast
Her own reward of happiness doth rest;
And when her spirit wings its flight to heaven,
To her a crown of glory shall be given.

* The above lines were written before the public attention had been directed to this remarkable case of disinterested benevolence.

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THE FEMALE HERMIT.

In a cavern damp and dreary,
Where the sunbeam never shone,
Lived an aged female hermit,
Half a century, alone.

All that time she was dependant
On the bounty of the wave,
And the offerings of the stranger,
That came visiting her cave.

Near her did a frowning headland
Its steep rugged sides upraise,
With the green Atlantic billow,
Ever foaming at its base.

Why she left her home of childhood,
In that dread abode to dwell,
With the sea-mew and the ospray,
She was never heard to tell.

It seemed not love-lorn disappointment,
Nor devotion, made her flee
From man's haunts, and live a hermit
By the melancholy sea.

As she bask'd her in the sunshine,
Near the entrance of her cave,
You might fancy 'twas the mermaid,
Newly risen from the wave.

So accustomed were the sea-fowl
To her presence, day by day,
That they screamed not when they saw her,
Nor in terror flew away.

Hers was many a sleepless midnight,
In that cell-like cavern hoar,
When the tempest burst around her,
With its loud appalling roar.

She has heard wild voices mingle
With the breaker's thunder-shocks,
When the bark was dashed to pieces
Like a toy against the rocks.

Once she saved a child from drowning];
And, though that was long ago,
Glad tears, while she told the story,
Down her faded cheek would flow.

In that desolate seclusion—
With no earthly friend or tie—
Always cheerful and contented,
She resolved to live and die.

Yea, with none to tend her death-bed,
Did her spirit thence depart ;
What a mystery's human nature,
And the workings of the heart ?

A RETROSPECT.

WRITTEN IN THE BEGINNING OF SUMMER.

Those gladsome sights and sounds have come again,
That charmed my spirit in my childhood's days,
When, void of care, I strolled along the plain,
And plucked the cowslips on the sunny braes.

Amid the music floating through the air,
I hear the skylark's loudly swelling note,
Reminding me too well of joys that were,
And one dear scene that ne'er can be forgot.

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I see it still—the sweet and flowery glade,
Where, with my mates, I ran in boyish glee—
The thymy bank with butter-cups o'erspread—
The wild brook gurgling onwards to the sea.

And when the rude winds slumbered in their cave,
And sunshine lit that tranquil ocean wide,
What joy was ours each tiny surge to brave,
And fondly gambol in its sparkling tide.

That happy time—so pure without alloy—
To me now seems like yesterday—how brief!
Yet years have passed, of sorrow and of joy,
And I am sinking in the “yellow leaf.”

Ambition's dreams within my breast are dead,
And Poesy's sweet flame is dying too—
That round me oft its kindly influence shed,
And tinged my path with many a rainbow hue.

Farewell, my lute! my days of song are o'er,
And age is pressing with its weary load,—
At morn or eve I'll wake thy tones no more,
Henceforth my thoughts must commune with my God.

F I N I S .

THE SOLDIER'S BRIDE, AND OTHER POEMS.

BY JAMES T. CALDER,

Author of "Sketches from John O'Groat's," &c.

PRICE 2s. 6d.

Edinburgh : MacLachlan, Stewart, & Co. Wick : Peter Reid,
and William Rae.

OPINIONS OF THE PRESS.

JOHN O'GROAT JOURNAL.

OF Mr Calder's poetical talents, it is unnecessary for us to speak. Our columns have frequently been graced with the productions of his pen. "The Soldier's Bride" (the principal poem in the work), is founded on a legendary tale of Caithness ; and, while it brings out, in well-told language, the characteristics of a dark and cruel age, it furnishes abundant proof of the cultivated poetical talents of the author.

CAITHNESS CHRONICLE.

WE have much pleasure in calling the attention of the literary public, and particularly that of our northern friends, to this most interesting little volume, emanating, as it does, from "one of themselves ;" one who may justly be styled the bard of Caithness. "The Soldier's Bride" (a legend of the Sinclairs of Caithness), is a very interesting poem, in three cantos. The volume also contains several minor pieces of considerable merit.

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EDINBURGH EVENING POST AND RECORD.

"THE SOLDIER'S BRIDE," the largest poem in the collection, contains many fine and striking passages. The miscellaneous poems are, in numerous instances, of a superior order—varied in character—facetious, as in "Paulina Vandersnooks"—pathetic, as in "the Broken Heart"—descriptive, as in "Winter." Mr Calder has a keen eye for the beauties of nature, and in some very fine pieces has dealt with its scenes and phenomena in a style worthy of a poet.

EDINBURGH ADVERTISER.

MR CALDER is not a stranger to the reading world ; he has quaffed the waters of Helicon, dallied with the muses in the groves of Parnassus, and written a great deal for the " John O'Groat Journal." The northern press has spoken very favourably of him, as a man of undoubted genius, taste, and learning ; and this flattering verdict we have no intention to dispute. His verses are far above mediocrity, indicating mental culture, and the inspiration of genuine poetry.

PEEBLES SHIRE ADVERTISER.

To Mr Calder's friends and neighbours in the north, his volume must be acceptable, from embodying in gently flowing verse some of their native traditions, while to us it realizes vividly in its descriptions of scenery, and the events which are narrated, the feelings and habits of our northern countrymen before the present civilized era. Nor is our author deficient in a vein of satire ; and some of his humorous pieces show a keen perception of the ludicrous.

DELTA.

THE volume is exceedingly creditable to Mr Calder's taste and talents, and, in his sequestered locality, must have afforded great gratification in the producing.

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