

The Twa Herds; or, The Holy Tulzie

An Unco Mournfu Tale

*Blockheads with reason, wicked wits abhor,
But fool with fool is barbarous civil war.— Pope*

A quarrel over parish boundaries between two ministers, Alexander Moodie of Riccarton, and John Russell of Kilmarnock came to a head at a meeting of the presbytery, resulting in loud and abusive altercations between the two men.

Burns was never one to let such an opportunity slip, and wrote the following satire about the occasion. The Auld-Light preachers were the fire and brimstone brigade, threatening their congregations with eternal damnation, while the New-Lights were the moderates who preached with understanding and compassion.

O a' ye pious godly flocks,
Weel fed on pastures orthodox,
Wha now will keep you frae the fox,
Or worrying tykes?
Or wha will tent the waifs and crocks.
About the dykes?

The twa best herds in a' the wast,
That e'er gae gospel horns a blast
These five an' twenty simmers past—
O dool to tell!
Hae had a bitter, black outcast
Atween themsel.

O Moodie, man, an' wordy Russell,
How could you breed sae vile a bustle?
Ye'll see how New-Light herds will whistle,
An' think it fine!
The Lord's cause gat na sic a twissle
Sin' I hae min'.

This division means that the regular churchgoers will have no minister to turn to and the sick and elderly will be left without assistance. *wha* = who; *frae* = from; *tykes* = dogs; *tent the waifs an' crocks* = tend to the stragglers and the elderly

The two ministers who have long been friends have fallen out.
herd = shepherd; *wast* = west; *dool* = sad; *simmers* = summers

While the two are at loggerheads, the others will benefit. He cannot recall such a carry-on in the Church.
gat na sic a twissle = got into such a twist;
sin I hae min' = since I can recall

O Sirs! whae'er wad hae expeckit
 Your duty ye wad sae negleckit?
 Ye wha was ne'er by lairds respeckit
 To wear the plaid,
 But by the vera brutes eleckit,
 To be their guide!

What flock wi' Moodie's flock could rank
 Sae hale an' hearty every shank?
 Nae poison'd, soor Ariminian stank
 He let them taste;
 But Calvin's fountain-head they drank,—
 O, sic a feast!

The fulmart, wil-cat, brock, an' tod
 Weel kend his voice thro' a' the wood;
 He smell'd their ilka hole an' road,
 Baith out an' in;
 An' weel he lik'd to shed their bluid,
 An' sell their skin.

What herd like Russell tell'd his tale?
 His voice was heard o'er muir and dale;
 He kend the Lord's sheep, ilka tail,
 O'er a' the height;
 An' tell'd gin they were sick or hale,
 At the first sight.

He fine a maingy sheep could scrub;
 And nobly fling the gospel club;
 Or New-Light herds could nicely drub
 And pay their skin;
 Or hing them o'er the burning dub,
 Or shute them in.

This refers to the choosing of ministers by the lairds in the expectation that they would be their spiritual guides. The plaid was the clothing worn by shepherds which was the dress at that time for ministers.

Moodie's congregation had always been the most pious and righteous, and were extremely Calvinistic in their lives.
hale = whole; *shank* = leg; *soor Ariminian*
stank = stagnant pool; *sic* = such

Moodie's voice was well known to the furry creatures in the woods as he loved to trap and kill them and sell their skins.
fulmart = polecat; *wil-cat* = wildcat; *brock* = badger; *tod* = fox; *ilka* = every; *baith* = both; *bluid* = blood

Burns compares Russell's congregation to a flock of sheep which he knew intimately. He knew if they were genuinely ill or merely evading him.
muir = moor; *gin* = if

He knew how to purify any poor sinner by threats about hell. As for the New-Lights, he would hang them over the fires of hell or simply throw them in to roast.
hing = hang; *the burning dub* = the lake of hell

Sic twa – O! do I live to see 't?—
 Sic famous twa sud disagree 't,
 An' names like, 'Villain, Hypocrite,'
 Each ither gi'en
 While enemies wi' laughing spite,
 Say 'neither's liein'

A' ye wha tent the Gospel fauld,
 Thee Duncan deep, an' Peebles shaul',
 But chiefly great Apostle Auld,
 We trust in thee,
 That thou wilt work them, het an' cauld,
 To gar them gree.

Consider, sirs, how we're beset!
 There's scarce a new herd that we get
 But comes frae 'mang that cursed set,
 I winna name:
 I trust in Heav'n to see them het
 Yet in a flame!

Dalrymple has been lang our fae,
 M'Gill has wrought us meikle wae,
 An' that curs'd rascal ca'd M'Quhae,
 An' baith the Shaws,
 That aft hae made us black an' blae,
 Wi' vengeful paws.

Auld Wodrow lang has wrought mischief,
 We trusted death wad bring relief,
 But he has gotten, to our grief,
 Ane to succeed him,
 A chield wha'll soundly buff our beef—
 I meikle dread him.

While the two are busy insulting each other with abusive name-calling, the moderates are laughing and stating that they are both telling the truth about each other.
sud = should; *liein* = lying.

Burns now uses deep sarcasm as he pleads with those preachers who have made his life a misery over the years to resolve the quarrel between their fellows.
tent = tend; *fauld* = fold; *shaul* = shallow;
het = hot; *cauld* = cold

He mockingly tells how concerned he is that any new preacher is from the moderate camp and that he would like to see them burn in hell.

He goes on to relate the fear that has been generated by various preachers.
fae = foe; *meikle wae* = much woe

They thought that when Wodrow died that they would have some relief, but his successor is just as brutal in his ministry.
child = fellow; *buff our beef* = strike us

And monie mae that I could tell,
 Wha fain would openly rebel,
 Forby turn-coats amang oursel:
 There's Smith for ane—
 I doubt he's but a greyneck still,
 An' that ye'll fin'!

O! a' ye flocks o'er a' the hills,
 By mosses, meadows, moors, an' fells,
 Come, join your counsels and your skills
 To cove the lairds,
 And get the brutes the power themsels
 To chuse their herds!

Then Orthodoxy yet may prance,
 An' Learning in a woody dance,
 An' that curst cur ca'd Common-sense,
 Wha bites sae rair,
 Be banished o'er the sea to France—
 Let him bark there!

Then Shaw's an' Dalrymple's eloquence,
 McGill's close, nervous excellence,
 M'Qhae's pathetic, manly sense,
 An' Guid M'math,
 Wha thro the heart can brawly glance,
 May a' pack aff!

There's lots more that he could tell. One of the preachers is still a gambler, as they will find out.

fain = gladly; *forby* = besides; *greyneck* = gambler

He then suggests that all the congregations should rally against the lairds and let the preachers choose their own parishes.

The old-style will flourish while that whipper-snapper called the New-Light will be banished from these shores.

woody dance = hanging

His biting sarcasm closes with the comments that the excellent, sensible preachers can then all be got rid off if the old lot get their way.

Holy Willie's Prayer

And send the godly in a pet to pray – Pope

The church, or Kirk, was obviously a source for much of Burns' verse. *Holy Willie's Prayer* is a classic example of how he could see through hypocrisy and false piety as if he was looking through glass.

This time his target was an elder (an office-bearer in the Presbyterian Church) of Mauchline Parish. An old bachelor who, although not adverse to sexual encounters with certain ladies of the Parish, still considered himself to be far superior to the other lesser mortals who attended the Kirk, and who really believed that the Good Lord should send them all to Hell, but of course, he and his kinsfolk should go straight to Heaven.

Should you ever have an opportunity to listen to this poem being recited by a true exponent of Burns, then grasp the opportunity – it will be a delight to be savoured for a long, long time.

O Thou that in the Heavens does dwell!
Wha, as it pleases best Thyself,
Sends ane to Heaven, an' ten to Hell,
A' for Thy glory,
And no' for onie guid or ill
They've done before Thee!

I bless and praise Thy matchless might,
When thousands Thou hast left in night,
That I am here before Thy sight,
For gifts an' grace
A burning and a shining light
To a' this place.

What was I, or my generation
That I should get sic exaltation?
I, wha deserv'd most just damnation
For broken laws,
Sax thousand years ere my creation,
Thro' Adam's cause!

In the first three verses, Holy Willie is concentrating on ingratiating himself with the Lord by pointing out just how great and mighty He is.

ane = one, *onie guid* = any good

sic = such; *wha* = who

sax = six; *ere* = before

When from my mither's womb I fell,
 Thou might hae plung'd me deep in Hell,
 To gnash my gooms, and weep and wail
 In burning lakes
 Whare damned devils roar and yell,
 Chain'd to their stakes.

Yet I am here, a chosen sample,
 To show Thy grace is great and ample;
 I'm here a pillar o' Thy temple,
 Strong as a rock,
 A guide, a buckler, and example,
 To a' Thy flock!

(O Lord Thou kens what zeal I bear,
 When drinkers drink, and swearers swear,
 And singin' there, and dancin' here,
 Wi' great an' sma';
 For I am keepet by Thy fear,
 Free frae them a'.)

But yet, O Lord, confess I must
 At times I'm fash'd wi' fleshly lust;
 An' sometimes, too, in wardly trust,
 Vile self gets in;
 But Thou remembers we are dust,
 Defil'd wi' sin.

O Lord! yestreen, Thou kens, wi' Meg —
 Thy pardon I sincerely beg—
 O, may 't ne'er be a living plague
 To my dishonour!
 An' I'll ne'er lift a lawless leg
 Again upon her

The next two verses show us Willie at his best as a groveller, but one whose opinion of his own standing knows no bounds.

mither = mother

buckler = shield

Next he confesses to his sexual transgressions, but they were all mistakes and not really his fault, because, as he reminds the Lord, we are only made of dust and are susceptible to sin.

fash'd = troubled

yestreen = last night; *Thou kens, wi' Meg* = You know, with Meg

Besides, I farther maun avow –
 Wi' Leezie's lass, three times I trow –
 But, Lord, that Friday I was fou
 When I cam near her,
 Or else, Thou kens, Thy servant true
 Wad never steer her

Maybe Thou lets this fleshly thorn
 Buffet Thy servant e'en and morn,
 Lest he owre proud and high should turn,
 That he's sae gifted:
 If sae, thy han' maun e'en be borne,
 Until Thou lift it.

Lord, bless Thy chosen in this place,
 For here Thou hast a chosen race!
 But God, confound their stubborn face
 An' blast their name,
 Wha bring Thy elders to disgrace
 An' open shame!

Lord, mind Gau'n Hamilton's deserts;
 He drinks, an' swears, an' plays at cartes.
 Yet has sae monie takin arts,
 Wi' great an' sma',
 Frae God's ain Priest the people's hearts
 He steals awa'.

And when we chasten'd him therefore,
 Thou kens how he bred sic a splore,
 An' set the warld in a roar
 O' laughin' at us;
 Curse Thou his basket and his store,
 Kail an' potatoes!

In fact, it had only happened with Lizzie's daughter because he had too much to drink, otherwise he would never have touched her.

maun avow = must say; *trow* = believe;
fou = drunk; *steer* = molest

Now he starts to wonder if perhaps the Lord might have given him this earthly problem to prevent him from becoming too high and mighty, even although he is obviously very gifted.

e'en and morn = night and day; *owre* = over; *Thy han' maun e'en be borne* = the weight of Your hand must always be felt

Finally, we discover that the real purpose of Willie's praying is to have Holy retribution brought upon one who Willie insists is a disgrace to the community.

Now he complains to the Lord that his enemy, Gavin Hamilton, is a man who drinks and swears and gambles, but is so popular that he is turning people away from the kirk.

cartes = cards; *so monie takin' arts* = is so popular; *wi' great and sma'* = with all classes of people; *frae* = from, *ain* = own

Here, Willie complains that when he attempted to punish Hamilton, he caused such an uproar that everyone finished up by laughing at Willie.

sic a splore = such a fuss; *kail* = cabbage

Lord, hear my earnest cry and pray'r
 Against that Presbt'ry of Ayr!
 Thy strong right hand, Lord, mak it bare
 Upo' their heads!
 Lord, visit them, and dinna spare,
 For their misdeeds!

O Lord, my God! that glib-tongu'd Aiken,
 My vera heart and flesh are quaking
 To think how I sat, sweatin, shakin,
 An' pish'd wi' dread,
 While Auld wi' hingin lip gaed sneakin,
 And hid his head.

Lord, in Thy day o' vengeance try him!
 Lord, visit him wha did employ him!
 And pass not in Thy mercy by them
 Nor hear their pray'r,
 But for Thy people's sake destroy them,
 An' dinna spare!

But, Lord, remember me and mine
 Wi' mercies temporal and divine,
 That I for grace an' gear may shine,
 Excelled by nane;
 And a' the glory shall be Thine -
 Amen, Amen!

While he is at it, Willie decides to tackle the Lord on another area giving him problems, the Presbytery of Ayr. He asks that the Lord really makes these people suffer for their wrong-doings.
hard mak' it bare = hit them hard

The particular culprit is one Robert Aiken, who had apparently given Willie a tongue-lashing which had left him sweating and shaking with fear and almost wetting himself.

Not only does Willie want the Lord to make Aiken suffer, he wants anyone for whom Aiken had ever worked to suffer the same fate with no mercy.

The final verse is a wonderful example of sanctimonious grovelling, as Willie points out to the Lord, that he, Willie, is such a wonderful person, of such grace, that he and his family should be treated mercifully by the Lord.
gear = wealth

Epistle to J Lapraik

The poems, songs and letters of Robert Burns give a remarkable insight into the various lifestyles of the period. John Lapraik was an elderly farmer, forced into bankruptcy through the collapse of the Ayr Bank, and subsequently jailed for debt. Although he had already built himself a reputation as a poet, his period of incarceration provided him with time to concentrate on his verse and his works were eventually published in 1788. Burns was very impressed by Lapraik's writings, as the following verses show.

While briars an' woodbines budding green,
And paitricks scaitchin' loud at e'en,
An' morning poussie whiddin seen,
Inspire my Muse,
This freedom, in an *unknown* frien'
I pray excuse.

Burns explains to his new friend that he finds his inspiration in the fields, and hopes that Lapraik will excuse his presumptions. *paitricks* = partridges; *scaitchin'* = screeching; *poussie whiddin* = running hares

On Fasten-e'en we had a rockin',
To ca' the crack and weave our stockin';
And there was muckle fun and jokin',
Ye need na doubt;
At length we had a hearty yokin',
At 'sang about.'

On the evening before Lent he had enjoyed the fellowship of his neighbours with lots of merriment and singing.

Fasten-e'en = the eve of Lent; *rockin'* = party, *ca' the crack* = chat; *weave our stockin'* = dancing; *yokin'* = a stretch; *sang about* = sing-song

There was ae sang among the rest,
Aboon them a' it pleas'd me best,
That some kind husband had address't,
To some sweet wife;
It thirl'd the heart-strings thro' the breast,
A' to the life.

One particular song told of the love of a man for his wife, and this one really appealed to Burns.

aboon = above; *thirl'd* = thrilled

I've scarce heard ought describ'd sae weel,
 What gen'rous, manly bosoms feel;
 Thought I, 'Can this be Pope, or Steele,
 Or Beatties wark?'
 They tald me 'twas an odd kind chiel
 About Muirkirk.

He had seldom heard the feelings of a man described with such tenderness, and thought it must be by one of the famous writers of the time, until told it was by the man from Muirkirk.

chiel = fellow

It pat me fidgin-fain to heart,
 An' sae about him there I spier't;
 Then a' that kent him round declar'd
 He had ingine;
 That nane excell'd it, few cam near 't,
 It was sae fine:

He was so excited about the song that he had to find out about the writer, who was described as a genius whose work could not be bettered.

pat me fidgin-fain = got me excited; *spier't* = enquired; *kent* = knew; *ingine* = genius

That, set him to a pint of ale,
 An' either douce or merry tale,
 Or rhymes an' sangs he'd made himsel',
 Or witty catches,
 'Tween Inverness and Teviotdale,
 He had few matches.

Put a pint of ale in front of him and, whether drunk or sober, he will entertain you with his own songs and verses which nobody in Scotland can equal.

douce = grave; sober

Then up I gat, an' swoor an aith,
 Tho' I should pawn my pleugh an' graith,
 Or die a cadger pownie's death,
 At some dyke-back,
 A pint an' gill, I'd gie them baith
 To hear your crack.

Burns swears that he would give anything to meet with Lapraik to hear him for himself.

swoor an aith = swore an oath; *pleugh an' graith* = plough and equipment; *cadger pownie* = tinker's pony; *dyke-back* = behind a fence; *crack* = cha

But, first an' foremost, I should tell,
 Amaist as soon as I could spell,
 I to the crambo-jingle fell;
 Tho' rude an' rough—
 Yet croonin' to a body's sel'.
 Does weel enough.

He explains that he started rhyming almost as soon as he could spell, and although it was rough and ready, he enjoyed singing to himself.

amaist = almost; *crambo-jingle* = rhymes; *croonin'* = humming; *a body's sel'* = oneself

I am nae poet, in a sense;
 But just a rhymer like by chance,
 An' hae to learning nae pretence;
 Yet, what the matter?
 Whene'er my Muse does on me glance,
 I jingle at her.

Your critic-folk may cock their nose,
 And say 'How can you e'er propose,
 You wha ken hardly verse frae prose,
 To mak a sang?'
 But, by your leaves, my learned foes,
 Ye're maybe wrang.

What's a' your jargon o' your schools.
 Your Latin names for horns an' stools?
 If honest Nature made you fools,
 What sairs your grammars?
 Ye'd better ta'en up spades and shools,
 Or knappin-hammers.

A set o' dull conceited hashes
 Confuse their brains in college-classes,
 They gang in stirks, and come out asses,
 Plain truth to speak;
 An' syne they think to climb Parnassus
 By dint o' Greek

Gie me ae spark o' Nature's fire,
 That's a' the learning I desire;
 Then tho' I drudge thro' dub an' mire
 At pleugh or cart,
 My Muse, tho' hamely in attire,
 May touch the heart.

He makes no claim to being a proper poet,
 merely a rhymer, and has no pretences
 about his education. He writes about
 what inspires him at the time.

Muse = an inspiring goddess; *I jingle at her*
 = I recite my verses to her

His critics may look down their nose at
 his efforts, but he is not dismayed for they
 may well be wrong.

wha ken hardly = who hardly know

What good is their education if they
 remain fools? Better to work as labourers.

a' your jargon = all your chatter; *sairs* =
 serves; *shools* = shovels; *knappin-hammers* =
 sledge-hammers

Many who attend college become conceited
 fools. They go in like bullocks but come out
 like asses, believing that a scant knowledge
 of Greek will lead them to greatness.

hashes = useless fellows; *stirks* = bullocks;
syne = then; *by dint o'* = on the strength of

Burns needs only Nature to inspire him
 and, although his writing may be simple,
 he hopes it will touch the hearts of those
 who read it.

dub an' mire = puddles and mud; *hamely in*
attire = simply dressed; *pleugh* = plough

O for a spunk o' Allan's glee,
 Or Ferguson's, the bauld an' slee,
 Or bright Lapraik's, my friend to be,
 If I can hit it!
 That would be lear enough for me,
 If I could get it.

Now, sir, if ye hae friends enow,
 Tho' real friends I b'lieve are few,
 Yet, if your catalogue be fow,
 I'se no insist;
 But, gif ye want a friend that's true,
 I'm on your list.

I winna blaw about mysel',
 As ill I like my fauts to tell;
 But friends an' folk that wish me well,
 They sometimes roose me;
 Tho' I maun own, as monie still
 As far abuse me.

There's ae wee faut they whiles lay to me,
 I like the lasses – Gude forgie me!
 For monie a plack they wheedle frae me
 At dance or fair;
 Maybe some ither thing they gie me,
 They weel can spare.

But Mauchline Race or Mauchline Fair,
 I should be proud to meet you there;
 We'se gie ae night's discharge to care,
 If we forgather;
 An hae a swap o' rhymin-ware
 Wi' ane anither.

He would like to have a spark of the talent
 of other poets, and would be content to be
 as good as Lapraik.

spunk = spark; *bauld an' slee* = bold and sly;
lear = learning

Should Lapraik already have enough
 friends, then Burns will not pursue the
 matter, but if he is looking for one who
 will be true, then he is the man.

enow = enough; *fow* = full; *gif* = if

He does not wish to boast, neither does he
 want to relate his faults. While some
 praise comes from his friends he also gets
 abuse from others.

winna blaw = won't boast; *ill* = little; *roose*
 = praise; *maun own* = must admit

He does have one little fault in that he has
 a weakness for the girls. Often he's been
 coaxed into giving them some money, but
 it would probably be repaid through some
 sexual favour.

Gude forgie = God forgive; *plack* = coin.

Burns would love to meet Lapraik at the
 races or the fair. He is sure that they will
 have a wonderful time drinking and
 exchanging songs and verses

The four-gill chap, we'se gar him clatter,
 An' kirsen him wi' reekin' water;
 Syne we'll sit down an' tak our whitter
 To cheer our heart;
 An' faith, we'se be acquainted better
 Before we part.

Awa ye selfish, warly race,
 Wha think that havins, sense an' grace,
 Ev'n love an' friendship should give place
 To Catch-the-Plack!
 I dinna like to see your face,
 Nor hear your crack.

But ye whom social pleasure charms,
 Whose hearts the tide of kindness warms,
 Who hold your being on the terms,
 'Each aid the others,'
 Come to my bowl, come to my arms,
 My friends and brothers!

But, to conclude my lang epistle,
 As my auld pen's worn to the grissle,
 Twa lines frae you would gar me fissle,
 Who am most fervent,
 While I can either sing or whistle,
 Your friend and servant.

The four-gill whisky cup will be well used,
 then they will settle down with their ale. By
 the end of the evening they will be old
 friends.

chap = cup; *kirsen* = christen; *reekin'* =
 steaming; *whitter* = a hearty draught

Burns scorns the wordly people who cast
 aside manners, and even love and
 friendship, in the pursuit of money. He
 has no wish to associate with them.

warly = wordly; *havins* = manners; *Catch-
 the-Plack* = making money; *crack* = chat

Kind, convivial people are the sort that
 Burns wishes to have around him. People
 who support their friends in times of
 hardship.

His pen is finally wearing out, but even
 just two lines from his fellow poet would
 thrill him.

grissle = gristle; *would gar me fissle* = would
 make me tingle

Death and Doctor Hornbook

Betty Davidson, an old friend of Burns' mother, loved to tell the children tales of the supernatural, much of which is evident in the Bard's works, and no more so than in this ghostly tale.

A hornbook was a learning-aid used extensively in schools. It was a sheet of paper on which was written the letters of the alphabet, numbers, the rules of spelling and the words of the Lord's prayer, mounted upon a piece of board and covered by a very thin sheet of transparent horn.

Schoolmasters were commonly referred to as hornbooks, and Burns' inspiration for this poem was one John Wilson, who was appointed to Tarbolton School in 1781, and who Burns came to know through his Masonic activities. To Burns' alarm, Wilson enjoyed flouting his limited knowledge of medicine, and during a time when practising medicine was uncontrolled, quacks such as Wilson were in abundance.

Some books are lies frae end to end,
And some great lies were never penn'd:
Ev'n ministers, they hae been kend,
In holy rapture,
A rousing whid at times, to vend,
And nail 't wi Scripture.

But this that I am gaun to tell,
Which lately on a night befel,
Is just as true's the Deil's in Hell,
Or Dublin city:
That é'er he nearer comes oursel
'S a muckle pity!

The clachan yill had made me canty,
I was na fou, but just had plenty;
I stacher'd whyles, but yet took tent ay
To free the ditches;
An' hillocks, stanes, and bushes, kend ay
Frae ghaists an' witches.

All that is written is not always true, and even ministers have been known to embellish the Scriptures.

penn'd = written; *hae been kend* = have been known; *whid* = lie; *vend and nail't wi' Scripture* = insist it is true because it is in the Bible

This is going to be the honest truth. It seems that Dublin was considered the equivalent of Hell by Presbyterians at that time.

gaun = going; *Deil* = Devil; *muckle* = great

He'd drunk enough to be jolly, but not full, and although staggering, was careful to avoid places that might conceal ghosts and witches.

clachan yill = village ale; *canty* = jolly; *fou* = drunk; *stacher'd whyles* = sometimes staggered; *took tent* = took care

The rising moon began to glow
 The distant Cumnock Hills out-owre;
 To count her horns, wi' a' my pow'r,
 I set mysel';
 But whether she had three or four,
 I could na tell.

I was come round about the hill,
 And todlin' down on Willie's mill,
 Setting my staff wi' a' my skill,
 To keep me sicker;
 Tho' leeward whyles, against my will,
 I took a bicker.

I there wi' *Something* does forgather,
 That pat me in an eerie swither;
 An awfu' scythe, out-owre ae shouther,
 Clear-dangling, hang;
 A three-tae'd leister on the ither
 Lay, large and lang.

Its stature seem'd lang Scotch ells twa,
 The queerest shape that e'er I saw,
 For fient a wame it had ava;
 And then its shanks,
 They were as thin, as sharp an' sma'
 As cheeks o' branks.

'Guid-e'en,' quo I: 'Friend! hae ye
 been mawin',
 When ither folk are busy sawin'?'
 It seem'd to mak a kind o' stan',
 But naething spak.
 At length says I, 'Friend! whare ye gaun?
 Will ye go back?'

As the moon rose, he concentrated on trying to count the peaks on the distant hills, but was unable to focus clearly.
glowr = stare; *out-owre* = above; *horns* = peaks

Coming down towards the mill he needed his stick to keep steady, but against his will, his legs just kept running away with him.
todlin' = tottering; *sicker* = balance; *leeward whiles* = at times; *bicker* = run

He panicked when he realised he was not alone. There was a figure with a scythe on one shoulder and a large trident on the other.
eerie swither = terrified panic; *ae shouther* = one shoulder; *three-tae'd-leister* = trident

The creature was tall and seemed to have no stomach, but had very thin, small legs.
lang Scotch ells twa = about two metres; *fient a wame it had ava* = it had no belly at all; *cheeks o' branks* = horse bridle bits

In terror, the poet attempted to speak to the creature by inquiring if it had been mowing, but although it stopped, it said nothing.
mawin' = mowing; *sawin'* = sewing; *whare ye gaun* = where are you going

It spak right howe, -'My name is *Death*,
 But be na fley'd— Quoth I, 'Guid faith,
 Ye're may be here to stap my breath;
 But tent me billie:
 I red ye weel, tak care o' skaith,
 See, there's a gully!'

'Gudeman,' quo he, 'put up your whittle,
 I'm no design'd to try its mettle;
 But if I did, I wad be kittle
 To be mislear'd;
 I wad na mind it, no that spittle
 Out-owre my beard.'

'Weel, weel!' says I, 'a bargain b'e't;
 Come, gies your hand, an' sae we're gree't;
 We'll ease our shanks, an' tak a seat;
 Come, gie's your news:
 This while ye hae been monie a gate,
 At monie a house.'

'Ay, ay!' quo he, an' shook his head,
 It's e'en a lang, lang time indeed
 Sin' I began to nick the thread,
 An' choke the breath;
 Folk maun do something for their bread,
 An' sae maun *Death*.'

'Sax thousand years are near-hand fled
 Sin' I was to the butching bred,
 An monie a scheme in vain's been laid,
 To stap or scar me;
 Till ane Hornbook's ta'en up the trade,
 And faith! he'll waur me.'

In a hollow voice, it said its name was *Death*,
 but not to be afraid. The terrified poet said
 he was armed with a knife and would fight.
howe = hollow; *fley'd* = afraid; *stap* = stop; *tent*
me = heed me; *billie* = brother; *red ye weel* =
 advise you; *skaith* = injury; *gully* = large knife

The creature told him to put the knife away
 as it would be useless against him, although
 he might find it amusing it to shave his
 beard with it.
whittle = whittle; *wad be kittle* = would be
 amused; *mislear'd* = mischievous

They agreed to shake hands and sit down
 for a chat, as the poet was curious to know
 about the many visits *Death* had made over
 the years.
weel = well; *gie's* = give me; *gree't* = agreed;
ease our shanks = rest our legs; *monie* = many

Death agreed that he had been a long time
 on his journey, but everyone must earn their
 keep, and he was no different in that respect.
nick the thread an' choke the breath = take away
 life; *an' sae maun* = and so must

In the six thousand years he had been
 working he had no competition, but
 Hornbook was now killing off his customers
 at a very rapid rate, much to his disgust.
near-hand fled = nearly passed; *butching bred* =
 learning to bring death; *stap* = stop; *waur* =
 wear

'Ye ken Jock Hornbook i' the clachan?
Deil mak his kings-hood in a spleuchan!
He's grown sae weel acquaint wi' Buchan
And ither chaps,
The weans haud out their fingers laughin'
An' pouk my hips.'

'See, here's a scythe, an' there's a dart,
They hae pierc'd monie a gallant heart;
But Doctor Hornbook, wi' his art
An' cursed skill,
Has made them baith no worth a fart,
Damn'd haet they'll kill!'

'Twas but yestreen, nae further gane,
I threw a noble throw at ane;
Wi' less, I'm sure, I've hundreds slain;
But Deil-ma-'care!
It just play'd dirl on the bane,
But did nae mair.'

'Hornbook was by, wi' ready art,
An' had sae fortify'd the part,
That when I looked to my dart,
It was sae blunt.
Fient haet o't wad hae pierc'd the heart
Of a kail-runt.'

'I drew my scythe in sic a fury,
I near-hand cowpit wi' my hurry,
But yet the bauld Apothecary
Withstood the shock;
I might as weel hae try'd a quarry
O' hard whin-rock.'

He is so upset by Hornbook that he hopes the Devil will take his scrotum and turn it into a tobacco pouch. Hornbook even has children mocking Death.

i' the clachan = of the village; *king's-hood* = scrotum; *spleuchan* = tobacco pouch; *weans* = children; *haud* = hold; *pouk* = poke

Death's trident and scythe have taken many lives over the years, but Hornbook's medicines are killing people much faster, Death's tools are almost useless.

dart = trident; *baith* = both; *no' worth a fart* = useless; *damn'd haet they'll kill* = there's little they can kill

Only yesterday Death had thrown his trident at someone, and it simply bounced off a bone doing no serious damage.

yestreen = yesterday; *gane* = gone; *Deil-ma-'care* = Devil-may-care; *dirl on the bane* = tinkled off the bone; *nae mair* = no more

Hornbook's influence was so strong that it had blunted the trident so badly, it couldn't even penetrate a cabbage-stalk.

fient haet o't wad hae = would hardly; *kail-runt* = cabbage stalk

Death was so furious that he almost fell over in his haste to attack Hornbook with his scythe, but he might as well have attacked a lump of granite.

sic = such; *near-hand cowpit* = almost fell over; *bauld Apothecary* = bold doctor; *whin rock* = very hard rock

'Ev'n them he canna get attended,
 Altho' their face he ne'er had kend it,
 Just shite in a kail-blade, and send it,
 As soon's he smells 't,
 Baith their disease, and what will mend it,
 At once he tells 't.'

'And then a' doctors saws and whittles,
 Of a' dimensions, shapes and mettles,
 A' kinds o' boxes, mugs, and bottles,
 He's sure to hae;
 Their Latin names as fast he rattles
 As A B C.'

'Calces o' fossils, earths, and trees;
 True *sal-marinum* o' the seas;
 The *farina* o' beans an' pease,
 He has 't in plenty;
Aqua-fontis, what you please,
 He can content ye.'

'Forbye some new, uncommon weapons,
Urinus spiritus of capons;
 Or mite-horn shavings, filings, scrapings,
 Distill'd *per se*,
Sal-alkali o' midge-tail clippings
 And monie mae.'

'Waes me for Johnie Ged's-Hole now,
 Quoth I, 'if that thae news be true!
 His braw calf-ward whare gowans grew,
 Sae white an' bonie,
 Nae doubt they'll rive it wi' the plew;
 They'll ruin Johnie!'

Hornbook's powers are such that he doesn't need to see a patient. All he needs is their faeces wrapped in a cabbage leaf and he will diagnose the problem simply by the smell.
canna get attended = cannot see; *ne'er had kend it* = never knew; *kail-blade* = cabbage-leaf; *baith* = both

He has at hand all sorts of medical paraphernalia and knows the Latin names of the various potions that he keeps.
whittles = knives

Death believes that the potions that Hornbook dispenses will make everyone feel that he knows his medicine, but will simply kill them off rapidly.
calces = powders; *pease* = peas

He goes on to describe some of the more revolting potions which might seem more at home in the hut of a witch-doctor.
monie mae = many more

If Death is correct, the gravedigger's beautiful pasture will have to be dug up to accommodate all the bodies.
waes me = woe is me; *Johnie Ged's-Hole* = gravedigger; *braw calf-ward* = lovely grazing plot; *gowans* = daisies; *rive* = tear; *sheugh* = ditch

The creature grain'd an eldritch laugh,
 And says; 'Ye needna yoke the pleugh,
 Kirkyards will soon be till'd enough,
 Tak ye nae fear;
 They'll a' be trench'd wi' monie a sheugh
 In twa - three year.'

'Whare I kill'd ane, a fair strae death,
 By loss o' blood or want o' breath,
 This night I'm free to tak my aith,
 That Hornbook's skill
 Has clad a score i' their last claith,
 By drap an' pill.'

'An honest wabster to his trade,
 Whase wife's twa nieves were scarce
 weel-bred,
 Gat tippence-worth to mend her head,
 When it was sair;
 The wife slade cannie to her bed,
 But ne'er spake mair.'

'A countra Laird had ta'en the batts,
 Or some curmurring in his guts,
 His only son for Hornbook sets,
 An' pays him well,
 The lad, for twa guid gimmer-pets
 Was Laird himself.'

'A bonie lass, ye kend her name,
 Some ill-brewn drink had hov'd her wame;
 She trusts hersel, to hide the shame,
 In Hornbook's care;
 Horn sets her aff to her lang hame,
 To hide it there.'

Death laughed and declared that within a year or two there would be a need for ditches, not graves in the churchyards.
grain'd = groaned; *eldritch* = unearthly; *pleugh* = plough; *eneugh* = enough; *sheugh* = ditch

Hornbook's skill is so lethal that he is killing twenty to every one that Death can manage.
a fair strae death = died in bed; *aith* = oath; *clad a score i' their last claith* = put twenty in their burial shrouds; *drap* = drop of medicine

A weaver's wife had paid twopence for a cure for a headache, and although she had been a strong lady, she went to bed never to rise again.
wabster = weaver; *twa nieves* = two fists; *tippence* = twopence; *sair* = sore; *slade cannie* = crept quietly; *ne'er spake mair* = never spoke again/died

A country laird had colic, or some other stomach upset. His son took two ewes along to Hornbook to pay for a cure, only to become laird himself when his father died.
batts = colic; *curmurring* = commotion; *guid gimmer-pets* = good pet ewes

A young girl had drunk something which caused her stomach to swell, probably making her look pregnant. Hornbook's remedy was to send her home to die.
kend = knew; *hov'd her wame* = swollen her stomach; *lang hame* = coffin

'That's just a swatch o' Hornbook's way;
 Thus goes he on from day to day,
 Thus does he poison, kill, an' slay,
 An's weel paid for 't;
 Yet stop me o' my lawfu' prey,
 Wi' his damn'd dirt.'

'But hark! I'll tell you of a plot
 Tho' dinna you be speakin' o't!
 I'll nail the self-conceited sot,
 As dead's a herrin';
 Niest time we meet, I'll wad a groat,
 He gets his fairin!'

But just as he began to tell,
 The auld kirk-hammer strak the bell
 Some wee, short hour ayont the twal,
 Which rais'd us baith;
 I took the way that pleas'd mysel',
 And sae did *Death*.

These are just some examples of Hornbook's work, yet he continues to get well paid for poisoning and killing people while *Death* cannot get on with his legitimate business.

swatch = sample

Death confides his intention to kill the doctor, and will wager that it will be done by their next meeting.

sot = drunkard; *niest* = next; *wad a groat* = wager small amount; *fairin'* = just desserts

However, before he could tell of his plan, the church-bell rang out telling them it was past midnight, so they both rose to their feet and took their separate ways.

auld kirk-hammer strak the bell = church bell rang; *ayont the twal* = after midnight

Second Epistle to J Lapraik

APRIL 21, 1785

Lapraik had responded to the first epistle from Burns in similar vein, which prompted Rab to write a second epistle to Lapraik, lamenting the lot of the two poets. The opening verses give some insight into the long hours of toil that Burns endured as a young man.

While new-ca'd kye rowte the stake,
An' pownies reek in pleugh or braik,
This hour on e'enin's edge I take,
To own I'm debtor
To honest-hearted, auld Lapraik,
For his kind letter.

Forjesket sair, with weary legs,
Rattlin the corn out-owre the rigs,
Or dealing thro' amang the naigs,
Their ten-hours bite;
My awkward Muse sair pleads and begs,
I would na write.

The tapetless, ramfeezl'd hizzie,
She's saft at best an' something lazy;
Quo she, 'Ye ken we've been sae busy
This month an' mair,'
That trowth, my head is grown right dizzie,
An' something sair.

Her dowf excuses pat me mad,
'Conscience,' says I, 'ye thowless jad!
I'll write, an' that a hearty blaud,
This vera night;
So dinna ye affront your trade,
But rhyme it right.'

It's the end of the working day and he is grateful to Lapraik for his letter.

new-ca'd kye = newly driven cattle; *rowte* = low; *reek* = steam; *braik* = harrow

He is exhausted after a day of ploughing and feeding the horses, and sense tells him not to attempt the reply.

forjesket sair = tired and sore; *rattlin* = spreading; *dealing thro amang the naigs* = feeding the horses

His girl helper is complaining at how hard they are having to work.

tapetless = foolish; *ramfeezl'd* = exhausted; *hizzie* = girl

He is so incensed by her laziness that he resolves to write a long letter to show her up.
dowf = witless; *thowless* = lacking in spirit; *jad* = hussy; *blaud* = screed

'Shall bauld Lapraik, the king o' hearts,
 Tho' mankind were a pack o' cartes,
 Roose ye sae weel for your deserts,
 In terms sae friendly;
 Yet ye'll neglect to shaw your parts
 An' thank him kindly?'

Sae I gat paper in a blink,
 An' doon gaed stumpie in the ink:
 Quoth I, 'Before I sleep a wink,
 I vow I'll close it;
 An' if ye winna mak it clink,
 By Jove, I'll prose it!'

Sae I've begun to scrawl, but whether
 In rhyme, or prose, or baith thegither,
 Or some hotch-potch that's rightly neither,
 Let time mak proof;
 But I shall scribble down some blether
 Just clean aff-loof.

My worthy friend, ne'er grudge an' carp,
 Tho' Fortune use you hard an' sharp;
 Come, kittle up your moorlan harp
 Wi' gleesome touch!
 Ne'er mind how Fortune waft an' warp;
 She's but a bitch.

She's gien me monie a jirt an' fleg,
 Sin' I could striddle o'er a rig;
 But, by the Lord, tho' I should beg
 Wi' lyart pow,
 I'll laugh an' sing, an' shake my leg,
 As lang's I dow!

He feels an obligation to Lapraik to thank him for his words of praise and friendship, and he must do it promptly.
cartes = cards; *roose* = praise

He promised himself that he would finish it that same night even if he had to use prose.
stumpie = quill; *mak it clink* = make it rhyme

The letter is begun, but will it be rhyme or prose, or both? He is writing straight off the cuff as the words come to him.
aff-loof = off the cuff

His advice is to ignore the misfortunes that nature throws at one, but to keep happy at all time.
kittle = tickle; *waft* = weave

He's had many a shock and scare over the years, but he refuses to bow his head and simply laughs them off.
jirt an' fleg = jerk and fright; *striddle* = straddle; *lyart pow* = grey head; *dow* = can

Now comes the Sax-and-twentieth simmer
 I've seen the bud upo' the timmer,
 Still persecuted by the limmer
 Frae year to year;
 But yet, despite the kittle kimmer,
 I, Rob, am here.

Do you envy the city-gent,
 Behind a kist to lie and sklent;
 Or purse-proud, big wi' cent, per cent;
 An' muckle wame,
 In some bit brugh to represent
 A bailie's name?

Or is 't the paughty feudal thane,
 Wi' ruffl'd sark an' glancin cane,
 Wha thinks himself nae sheep-shank bane,
 But lordly stalks;
 While caps an' bonnets aff are taen,
 As by he walks?

'O Thou wha gies us each guid gift!
 Gie me o' wit an' sense a lift,
 Then turn me, if Thou please adrift,
 Thro' Scotland wide;
 Wi' cits nor lairds I wadna shift,
 In a' their pride!

Were this the charter of our state,
 'On pain o' hell be rich an' great,'
 Damnation then would be our fate,
 Beyond remead;
 But, thanks to Heaven, that's no' the gate
 We learn our creed.

Now aged 26, Rab is still persecuted because of his many affairs, but he carries on despite the gossip.
timmer = branches; *limmer* = hussies; *kittle kimmer* = idle gossip

He has no envy of the city gent who spends his life behind a counter with his fat belly and who might even become a magistrate.
kist = counter/chest; *sklent* = squint greedily; *muckle wame* = fat belly; *brugh* = borough; *bailie* = magistrate

Or what about he haughty fellow, dressed in his fancy shirt and carrying a cane, who considers himself to be lordly and expects lesser people to raise their caps to him.
paughty = haughty; *ruffled sark* = shirt with ruffs

He then suggests to God that he might turn him loose to wander Scotland, but would not associate with city people or lairds. (A promise to be forgotten later in his life.)
lift = load; *cits* = city people

If gaining wealth and fame was the reason for living then both he and Lapraik would be destined to eternal damnation.
remead = remedy

For thus the Royal mandate ran,
 When first the human race began,
 The social, friendly, honest man,
 What'e'er he be,
 'Tis he fulfils great Nature's plan,
 An' none but *he*.'

O mandate, glorious and divine!
 The followers o' the ragged Nine—
 Poor, thoughtless devils! yet may shine
 In glorious light;
 While sordid sons o' Mammon's line
 Are dark as night!

Tho' here they scrape, an' squeeze, an' growl,
 Their worthless *nievefu'* of a soul,
 May in some future carcase howl,
 The forest's fright;
 Or in some day-detesting owl
 May shun the light.

Then may Lapraik and Burns arise,
 To reach their native, kindred skies,
 And sing their pleasures, hopes an' joys
 In some mild sphere;
 Still closer knit in friendship's ties,
 Each passing year!

However, since man was born, only
 honest men count for anything at the end
 of their lives.

The true followers of the Muses will find
 their way into Heaven, while those who
 have led dishonest lives are condemned to
 darkness

Their greed might find them in a future
 existence reborn as wild animals or some
 night creature who fears the daylight.
nievefu' = fistful

Burns and Lapraik will rise to the heavens
 and sing their songs forever and they will
 become close friends in the coming years.

Welcome to a Bastart Wean

A POET'S WELCOME TO HIS LOVE-BEGOTTEN DAUGHTER

Elizabeth Paton, a servant of the Burns family became pregnant by Robert Burns. Burns' family, with the exception of his mother, considered Elizabeth to be much too uncouth to be a suitable partner for him. Burns too must have considered her as being little more than a willing sexual partner, as the poem he wrote about her, 'My Girl She's Airy', could hardly be considered to be an epistle of love and respect. However, the following lines, dedicated to his illegitimate daughter display a true paternal fondness for the child.

Thou's welcome wean! mischanter fa' me,
If thoughts o' thee, or yet thy mammie.
Shall ever daunton me or awe me,
My bonie lady,
Or if I blush when thou shalt ca' me
Tyta, or daddie!

Tho' now they ca' me fornicator,
An' tease my name in kintra clatter,
The mair they talk, I'm kend the better,
E'en let them clash!
An auld wife's tongue's a feckless matter
To gie ane fash.

Welcome! my bonie, sweet, wee dochter!
Tho' ye came here a wee unsought for;
And tho' your coming I hae fought for
Baith kirk and queir;
Yet by my faith, ye're no unwrought for—
That I shall swear!

In the opening verse, Burns welcomes the arrival of his child and asks that misfortune fall upon him should he ever have ill-thoughts about the child or her mother, or if he should be embarrassed when his child calls him daddy. *wean* = child; *mischanter* = misfortune; *fa'* = fall; *daunton* = subdue; *awe* = owe; *Tyta* = father

He knows that people will call him unkind names and will gossip about him, but that by their talk he will become better known. One should not let gossips worry you. *kintra-clatter* = country gossip; *mair* = more; *kend* = known; *clash* = idle talk; *auld wife* = old woman; *feckless* = powerless; *gie ane fash* = give one trouble

He tells his daughter that even although her arrival was unplanned, she is no less welcome, and that he fought both the church and the courts to ensure her well-being, and that she must never think she was unwanted. *dochter* = daughter; *kirk and queir* = church and court; *unwrought* = unwanted

Sweet fruit o' monie a merry dint,
 My funny toil is no' a' tint,
 Tho' thou cam to the warl' asklent,
 In my last plack thy part's be in it
 The better half o't.

Tho' I should be the waur bestead,
 Thou's be as braw and bienly clad,
 And thy young years as nicely bred,
 Wi' education,
 As onie brat o' wedlock's bed,
 In a' thy station

Wee image o' my bonie Betty,
 As fatherly I kiss and daut thee,
 As dear, and near my heart I set thee
 Wi' as guid will,
 As a' the priests had seen me get thee
 That's out o' Hell.

Gude grant that thou may ay inherit
 Thy mither's looks an' gracefu' merit,
 An' thy poor, worthless daddie's spirit,
 Without his failin's!
 'Twill please me mair to see thee heir it,
 Than stockit mailins.

And if thou be what I wad hae thee
 I'll never rue my trouble wi' thee—
 The cost nor shame o't,
 But be a loving father to thee,
 And brag the name o't.

Although the result of many a happy liaison between her parents, some people may mock her for being illegitimate, but he will spend his last penny to ensure her well-being. *monie* = many; *dint* = liaison; *a' tint* = all lost; *warl'* = world; *asklent* = obliquely; *plack* = small coin; *o't* = of

Although it will make him poorer, he will see that she is as well-dressed, well-brought up, and well-educated as any child born to married parents.
waur = worse; *bestead* = position; *braw* = beautiful; *bienly* = comfortably; *onie brat o' wedlock's bed* = legitimate child

He sees in her a miniature of her lovely mother, and as he kisses her, he promises to love and cherish her, despite the terrible disapproval of the church.
daut = dote

He asks that God grants her her mother's beauty and graceful demeanour, and that she be given his spirit but without his faults. She will be better off with these gifts than having been left a well-stocked farm.
gude = God; *ay* = always; *mither* = mother; *stockit-mailin* = well-stocked farm

Finally he tells her that if she takes his advice and grows up as he would wish, then he will never regret the shame that he brought upon himself, but that he will be a truly loving father who boasts about his child.

The Fornicator

This is a rather defiant poem which appears to relate to the affair he had with Elizabeth Paton. Whereas the outcome of that relationship was the baby Elizabeth, Burns refers in this poem to a son.

Ye jovial boys who love the joys,
The blissful joys of Lovers;
Yet dare avow with dauntless brow,
When th' bony lass discovers;
I pray draw near and lend an ear,
And welcome in a Frater,
For I've lately been on quarantine,
A proven Fornicator.

Before the Congregation wide
I pass'd the muster fairly,
My handsome Betsey by my side,
We gat our ditty rarely;
But my downcast eye by chance did spy
What made my lips to water,
Those limbs so clean where I, between,
Commenc'd a Fornicator.

With rueful face and signs of grace
I pay'd the buttock-hire,
The night was dark and thro' the park
I could not but convoy her;
A parting kiss, what could I less,
My vows began to scatter,
My Betsey fell-lal de del lal lal,
I am a Fornicator.

He scorns the men who bear no responsibility when their lover becomes pregnant and tells how he has stood up to accept his punishment publicly.

th' bony lass discovers = finds herself pregnant; *Frater* = brother

The kirk paraded defaulters publicly and the ministers chastised them verbally.

Burns does not appear to be unduly concerned as he admits to having lecherous thoughts during the sermon.

ditty = sermon

He payed his fine with pious expression but all his vows of penitence disappeared as soon as Betsey and he were alone in the dark.

buttock-hire = a fine imposed by the kirk upon fornicators; *convoy* = accompany

But for her sake this vow I make,
 And solemnly I swear it,
 That while I own a single crown,
 She's welcome for to share it;
 And my roguish boy, his Mother's joy,
 And the darling of his Pater,
 For him I boast my pains and cost
 Although a Fornicator.

Ye wenching blades whose hireling jades
 Have tipt ye off blue-boram,
 I tell ye plain, I do disdain
 To rank ye in the Quorum;
 But a bony lass upon the grass
 To teach her esse Mater,
 And no reward but for regard,
 O that's a Fornicator.

Your warlike Kings and Heros bold,
 Great Captains and Commanders;
 Your mighty Caesars fam'd of old,
 And Conquering Alexanders;
 In fields they fought and laurels bought,
 And bulwarks strong did batter,
 But still they grac'd our noble list
 And ranked Fornicator!!!

He swears that half of what money he has
 shall be hers.

He scorns those who use prostitutes and
 become stricken with venereal disease. Far
 better to make love to an honest lass and
 pay for the consequences.

hireling jades = prostitutes; *tipt ye off blue-
 boram* = passed on pox (believed to refer
 to the infamous Blue Boar tavern in
 London); *esse Mater* = be a mother

He finally equates himself with famous
 figures in history who have also been
 fornicators.

The Vision

DUAN THE FIRST

Following his venture into the supernatural with *Death and Doctor Hornbook*, Burns returns to the theme. It commences with the Bard looking back over his life and lamenting how his rhyming has failed to augment his income. The *Vision*, naturally in the shape of a beautiful young woman, extols the beauty of the Scottish countryside and the virtues of Scotland's writers and heroes. Written and amended over a period of three or four years, it is interesting to note the change in style from the Auld Scots to pure English as the poem develops. Apart from a few glossary references in the opening verses, the poem is lucid in its meaning throughout.

The sun had clos'd the winter day,
The curlers quat their roaring play,
And hunger'd maukin taen her way,
To kail-yards green,
While faithless snaws ilk step betray
Whare she has been.

quat = quit; *roaring play* = curling; *maukin*
= hare; *ilk* = each

The thresher's weary flingin-tree,
The lee-lang day had tired me;
And when the day had clos'd his e'e,
Far i' the west,
Ben i' the spence, right pensivelie,
I gaed to rest.

flingin tree = flail; *lee-lang* = full length; *ben*
= through; *spence* = back parlour; *gaed* =
went

There, lanely by the ingle-cheek,
I sat an' ey'd the spewing reek,
That fill'd, wi' hoast-provoking smeek,
The auld, clay-biggin;
An' heard the restless rattons squeak
About the riggin'.

ingle-cheek = fireplace; *spewing reek* = fire;
hoast-provoking smeek = cough making
smoke; *clay-biggin* = primitive cottage;
rattons = rats; *riggin'* = boughs that made the
roof

All in this mottie, misty clime,
 I backward mus'd on wasted time:
 How I had spent my youthfu prime,
 An' done nae-thing,
 But stringing blethers up in rhyme,
 For fools to sing.

mottie = spotty; *mus'd* = mused; *blethers* =
 chatters

Had I to guid advice but harket,
 I might, by this, hae led a market,
 Or strutted in a bank and clarket
 My cash-account:
 While here, half-mad, half-fed, half-sarket,
 Is a' th' amount.

harket = listened; *clarket* = clerked; *half-
 sarket* = half-clothed

I started, muttr'ing 'blockhead! coof!
 An' heav'd on high my wauket loof,
 To swear by a' yon starry roof,
 Or some rash aith,
 That I, henceforth, would be rhyme-proof
 Till my last breath—

coof = fool; *wauket loof* = calloused palm;
aith = oath

When click! the string the snick did draw;
 And jee! the door gaed to the wa';
 And by my ingle-lowe I saw,
 Now bleezin bright,
 A tight, outlandish hizzie, braw,
 Come full in sight.

snick = door-latch; *ingle-lowe* = flame from
 fire; *hizzie* = young woman; *bleezin* =
 blazing

Ye need na doubt, I held my whisht;
 The infant aith, half-formed, was crush't;
 I glowr'd as eerie's I'd been dush't,
 In some wild glen;
 When sweet, like modest Worth, she blush't,
 And stepped ben.

held my whisht = kept quiet; *glowr'd* =
 stared; *dush't* = touched; *ben* = through

Green, slender, leaf-clad holly boughs
 Were twisted, graceful, round her brows;
 I took her for some Scottish Muse,
 By that same token;
 And come to stop those reckless vows,
 Would soon be broken.

A 'hair-brain'd, sentimental trace'
 Was strongly marked in her face;
 A wildly-witty, rustic grace
 Shone full upon her;
 Her eye, ev'n turned on empty space,
 Beam'd keen with honor.

Down flow'd her robe, a tartan sheen,
 Till half a leg was scrimply seen;
 And such a leg! my bonie Jean
 Could only peer it;
 Sae straught, sae taper, tight an' clean
 Nane else came near it.

scrimply = barely; *peer* = equal

Her mantle large, of greenish hue,
 My gazing wonder chiefly drew;
 Deep lights and shades, bold-mingling,
 threw,
 A lustre grand;
 And seem'd, to my astonish'd view,
 A well-known land.

mantle = cloak

Here, rivers in the sea were lost;
 There, mountains to the sky were toss't;
 Here, tumbling billows mark'd the coast,
 With surging foam;
 There, distant shone, Art's lofty boast,
 The lordly dome.

Here, Doon pour'd down his far-fetch'd
floods;

There, well-fed Irvine stately thuds:
Auld hermit Ayr staw thro' his woods,
On to the shore;
An' many a lesser torrent scuds,
With seeming roar.

staw = stole

scuds = whips

Low, in a sandy valley spread,
An ancient borough rear'd her head;
Still, as in Scottish story read,
She boasts a race,
To ev'ry nobler virtue bred,
An' polish'd grace.

By stately tow'r, or palace fair,
Or ruins pendent in the air,
Bold stems of heroes, here and there,
I could discern;
Some seem'd to muse, some seem'd to dare,
With feature stern.

My heart did glowing transport feel,
To see a race heroic wheel,
And brandish round the deep-dy'd steel,
In sturdy blows;
While, back-recoiling, seem'd to reel
Their Suthron foes.

Suthron = southern

His Country's Saviour, mark him well!
Bold Richardson's heroic swell;
The chief, on Sark, who gloriously fell
In high command;
And he whom ruthless fates expel
His native land.

William Wallace, and others who fought
for Scotland.

There, where a sceptr'd Pictish shade
 Stalk'd round his ashes lowly laid,
 I mark'd a martial race, pourtray'd
 In colours strong:
 Bold, soldier-featur'd, undismay'd,
 They strode along.

Thro' many a wild, romantic grove,
 Near many a hermit fancy'd cove
 (Fit haunts for friendship or for love,
 In musing mood),
 An aged Judge, I saw him rove,
 Dispensing good.

With deep-struck, reverential awe,
 The learned Sire and Son I saw:
 To Nature's God, and Nature's law,
 They gave their lore;
 This, all its source and end to draw,
 That, to adore.

Some of Scotland's famous scholars.

Brydon's brave Ward I well could spy,
 Beneath old Scotia's smiling eye;
 Who call'd on Fame, low standing by,
 To hand him on,
 Where many a patriot-name on high,
 And hero shone.

DUAN THE SECOND

With musing-deep, astonish'd stare,
I view'd the heavenly-seeming Fair;
A whisp'ring throb did witness bear
Of kindred sweet,
When with an elder sister's air
She did me greet.

'All hail! my own inspired Bard!
In me thy native Muse regard!
Nor longer mourn thy fate is hard,
Thus poorly low!
I come to give thee such reward,
As we bestow!

'Know, the great Genius of this land
Has many a light, aerial band,
Who, all beneath his high command
Harmoniously,
As arts or arms they understand,
Their labours ply.

'They Scotia's race among them share:
Some fire the sodger on to dare;
Some rouse the patriot up to bare
Corruption's heart;
Some teach the bard, a darling care,
The tuneful art.

'Mong swelling floods of reeking gore,
They, ardent, kindling spirits pour;
Or, 'mid the venal Senate's roar,
They sightless, stand,
To mend the honest patriot-lore,
And grace the hand.

'And when the bard, or hoary sage,
 Charm or instruct the future age,
 They bind the wild, poetic rage
 In energy,
 Or point the inconclusive page
 Full on the eye.

'Hence, Fullarton, the brave and young;
 Hence, Dempster's truth prevailing tongue;
 Hence, sweet harmonious Beattie sung
 His 'Minstrel lays';
 Or tore, with noble ardour stung,
 The sceptic's bays.

'To lower orders are assign'd
 The humbler ranks of human-kind,
 The rustic bard, the labouring hind,
 The artisan;
 All chuse, as various they're inclin'd,
 The various man.

'When yellow waves the heavy grain,
 The threat'ning storm some strongly rein;
 Some teach to meliorate the plain,
 With tillage-skill;
 And some instruct the shepherd-train,
 Blythe o'er the hill.

'Some hint the lover's harmless wile;
 Some grace the maiden's artless smile;
 Some soothe the lab'rer's weary toil
 For humble gains,
 And make his cottage-scenes beguile
 His cares and pains.

'Some, bounded to a district-space,
Explore at large man's infant race,
To mark the embryotic trace
Of rustic bard;
And careful note each op'ning grace,
A guide and guard.

'Of these am I - Coila my name:
And this district as mine I claim,
Where once the Campbells, chiefs of fame,
Held ruling pow'r:
I mark'd thy embryo-tuneful flame,
Thy natal hour.

'With future hope, I oft would gaze
Fond, on thy little early ways:
Thy rudely caroll'd, chiming phrase,
In uncouth rhymes
Fir'd at the simple, artless lays
Of other times.

'I saw thee seek the sounding shore,
Delighted with the dashing roar;
Or when the North his fleecy store
Drove thro' the sky,
I saw grim Nature's visage hoar
Struck thy young eye.

'Or when the deep green-mantled earth,
Warm cherish'd ev'ry flow'rets birth,
And joy and music pouring forth,
In ev'ry grove;
I saw thee eye the gen'ral mirth
With boundless love.

When ripen'd fields and azure skies,
 Call'd forth the reapers rustling noise,
 I saw thee leave their ev'ning joys,
 And lonely stalk,
 To vent thy bosom's swelling rise,
 In pensive walk.

'When youthful Love, warm-blushing, strong,
 Keen-shivering, shot thy nerves along,
 Those accents, grateful to thy tongue,
 Th' adored *Name*,
 I taught thee how to pour in song,
 To soothe thy flame.

I saw thy pulses maddening play,
 Wild-send thee Pleasure's devious way,
 Misled by Fancy's meteor-ray,
 By passion driven;
 But yet the light that led astray
 Was light from Heaven.

I taught thy manners-painting strains,
 The loves, the ways of simple swains,
 'Till now, o'er all my wide domains,
 Thy fame extends;
 And some, the pride of Coila's plains,
 Become thy friends.

Thou canst not learn, nor can I show,
 To paint with Thomson's landscape glow;
 Or wake the bosom-melting throe,
 With Shenstones art;
 Or pour, with Gray, the moving flow,
 Warm on the heart.

'Yet, all beneath th' unrivall'd rose,
 The lowly daisy sweetly blows;
 Tho' large the forest's monarch throws
 His army-shade,
 Yet green the juicy hawthorn grows,
 Adown the glade.

'Then never murmur nor repine;
 Strive in thy humble sphere to shine;
 And trust me, not Potosi's mine,
 Nor king's regard,
 Can give a bliss o'er matching thine,
 A rustic Bard.

'To give my counsels all in one,
 Thy tuneful flame still careful fan;
 Preserve the dignity of Man,
 With soul erect:
 And trust the Universal Plan
 Will all protect.

'And wear thou *this*'—She solemn said,
 And bound the holly round my head;
 The polish'd leaves and berries red
 Did rustling play;
 And, like a passing thought, she fled,
 In light away.