

Graham Harry

More Misrepresentative Men



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Authors Foreword

(To the Publisher)

WHEN honest men are all in bed,
We poets at our desks are toiling,
To earn a modicum of bread,
And keep the pot a-boiling;
We weld together, bit by bit,
The fabric of our laboured wit.

We see with eyes of frank dismay
The coming of this Autumn season,
When bards are driven to display
Their feast of rhyme and reason;
With hectic brain and loosened collar,
We chase the too-elusive dollar.

While Publishers, in search of grist,
Despise our masterly inaction,

And shake their faces in our fist,
Demanding satisfaction,
We view with vague or vacant mind
The grim agreements we have signed.

For though a willing public gives
Its timely share of cash assistance,
The author (like the dentist) lives
A hand-to-mouth existence;
And Publishers, those modern Circes,
Make pig's-ear purses of his verses.

Behold! How ill, how thin and pale,
The features of the furtive jester!
Compelled by contracts to curtail
His moments of siesta!
A true White Knight is he to-day
(*Nuit Blanche*, as Stevenson would say).

Ah, surely he has laboured well,
Constructing this immortal sequel, —
A work which no one could excel,
And very few can equal, —
A volume which, I dare to say,
Is epoch-making, in its way.

When other poets' work is not,
These verses shall retain their label;
When Herford is a thing forgot,

And Ade an ancient fable;
When Goops no longer give a sign
Of Burgess's empurpled kine.

My Publishers, I love you so!
Your well-secreted virtues viewing;
Who never let your right hand know
Whom your left hand is doing;
Who hold me firmly in your grip,
And crack your cheque-book, like a whip!

My Publishers, make no mistake,
You have in me an *avis rara*,
So write a princely cheque, and make
It payable to bearer;
I love you, as I said before,
But oh! I love your money more!

Publisher's Preface

(To the Author)

VORACIOUS Author, gorged with gold,
Your grasping greed shall not avail!
In vain you venture to unfold
Your false prehensile tale!
I view in scorn (unmixed with awe)
The width of your capacious maw.

On me the onus has to fall
Of your malevolent effusions;
'Tis I who bear the brunt of all
Your libellous allusions;
To bolster up your turgid verse,
I jeopardise my very purse!

You do not hesitate to fleece
The Publisher you scorn to thank,
And when you manage to decrease
His balance at the bank,
Your face is lighted up with greed,
And you are lantern-jawed indeed!

Yet will I still heap coals of fire,
Until your coiffure is imbedded,
And you at last, perchance, shall tire
Of growing so hot-headed,
And realise that being funny
Is not a mere affair of money.

And so, in honour of your pow'rs,
A fragrant bouquet will I pick,
Of rare exotics, blossoms, flow'rs
Of speech and rhetoric;
I'll add a thistle, if I may,
And, round the whole, a wreath of bay.

The blossoms for your button-hole,
To mark your affluent condition,
Exotics to inspire your soul
To further composition.
Come, set the bays upon your brow!

* * * * *

Well, eat the thistle, anyhow!

Robert Burns

THE jingling rhymes of Dr. Watts
Excite the reader's just impatience,
He wearies of Sir Walter Scott's
Melodious verbal collocations,
And with advancing years he learns
To love the simpler style of Burns.

Too much the careworn critic knows
Of that obscure robustious diction,
Which like a form of fungus grows
Amid the Kailyard school of fiction;
In Crockett's cryptic caves one sighs
For Burns's clear and spacious skies.

Tho' no aspersions need be cast
On Barrie's wealth of wit fantastic,
Creator of that unsurpass'd
If most minute ecclesiastic;
Yet even here the eye discerns
No master-hand like that of Burns.

The works of Campbell and the rest
Exhale a sanctimonious odour,
Their vintage is but Schnapps, at best,

Their Scotch is simply Scotch-and-sodour!
They cannot hope, like Burns, to win
That "touch which makes the whole world kin."

Tho' some may sing of Neil Munro,
And virtues in Maclaren see,
Or want but little here below,
And want that little Lang, maybe;
Each renegade at length returns,
To praise the peerless pow'rs of Burns.

His verse, as all the world declares,
And Tennyson himself confesses,
The radiance of the dewdrop shares,
The berry's perfect shape possesses;
And even William Wordsworth praises
The magic of his faultless phrases.

But he, whose books bedeck our shelves,
Whose lofty genius we adore so,
Was only human, like ourselves, —
Perhaps, indeed, a trifle more so!
And joined a thirst that nought could quench
To morals which were frankly French.

And ev'ry night he made his way,
With boon companions, bent on frolic,
To inns of ill-repute, where lay
Refreshments – chiefly alcoholic!

(But I decline to raise your gorges,
Describing these nocturnal orgies.)

Of love-affairs he knew no end,
So long and ardently he flirted,
And e'en the least suspicious friend
Would feel a trifle disconcerted,
When Burns was sitting with his "*sposa*,"
"As thick as thieves on Vallombrosa!"

A Cockney Chiel who found him thus,
And showed some conjugal alarm,
When Burns implored him not to fuss,
Enquiring calmly, "Where's the harm?"
Replied at once, with perfect taste,
"The *harm* is round my consort's waist!"

"A poor thing but my own," said he,
His fair but fickle bride denoting,
And she, with scathing repartee,
Assented, wilfully misquoting,
(Tho' carefully brought up, like Jonah),
"A poorer thing – and yet my owner!"

The most bucolic hearts were burnt
By Burns' amatory glances;
The most suburban spinsters learnt
To welcome his abrupt advances;
When Burns was on his knee, 'twas said,

They wished that *they* were there instead!

They loved him from the first, in spite
Of angry parents' interference;
They deemed his courtship so polite,
So captivating his appearance;
So great his charm, so apt his wit,
In local parlance, Burns was IT!

The rustic maids from far and wide,
Encouraged his unwise flirtations;
For love of Burns they moped and sighed,
And, while their nearest male relations
Were up in arms, the sad thing is
That they themselves were up in his!

His crest a mug, with open lid,
The kind in vogue with ancient Druids, —
Inscribed "Amari Aliquid,"
(Which means "I'm very fond of fluids!"),
On either side, as meet supporters,
The village blacksmith's lovely daughters.

"Men were deceivers ever!" True,
As Shakespeare says (Hey Nonny! Nonny!),
But one should always keep in view
That "*tout comprendr' c'est tout pardonny*";
In judging poets it suffices
To scan their verses, not their vices.

...

The poets of the present time
Attempt their feeble imitations;
Are economical of rhyme,
And lavish with reiterations;
The while a patient public swallows
A "Border Ballad" much as follows: —

*Jamie lad, I lo'e ye weel,
Jamie lad, I lo'e nae ither,
Jamie lad, I lo'e ye weel,
Like a mither.*

*Jamie's ganging doon the burn,
Jamie's ganging doon, whateffer,
Jamie's ganging doon the burn,
To Strathpeffer!*

*Jamie's comin' hame to dee,
Jamie's comin' hame, I'm thinkin',
Jamie's comin' hame to dee,
Dee o' drinkin'!*

Hech! Jamie! Losh! Jamie!

*Dinna greet sae sair!
Gin ye canna, winna, shanna
See yer lassie mair!
Wha' hoo!
Wha' hae!
Strathpeffer!*

I give you now, as antidote,
Some lines which I myself indited.
Carnegie, when he read them, wrote
To say that he was quite delighted;
Their pathos cut him to the quick,
Their humour almost made him sick.

*The queys are moopin' i' the mirk,
An' gin ye thole ahin' the kirk,
I'll gar ye tocher hame fra' work,
Sae straught an' primsie;
In vain the lavrock leaves the snaw,
The sonsie cowslips blithely blaw,
The elbucks wheep adoon the shaw,
Or warl a whimsy.
The cootie muircocks crouselly craw,
The maukins tak' their fud fu' braw,
I gie their wames a random paw,
For a' they're skilpy;
For wha' sae glaikit, gleg an' din,
To but the ben, or loup the linn,
Or scraw aboon the tirlin'-pin*

Sae frae an' gilpie?

Och, snood the sporran roun' ma lap,

The cairngorm clap in ilka cap,

Och, hand me o'er

Ma lang claymore,

Twa, bannocks an' a bap,

Wha hoo!

Twa bannocks an' a bap!

...

O fellow Scotsman, near and far,

Renowned for health and good digestion,

For all that makes you what you are, —

(But are you really? That's the question) —

Be grateful, while the world endures,

That Burns was countryman of yours.

And hand-in-hand, in alien land,

Foregather with your fellow cronies,

To masticate the haggis (cann'd)

At Scottish Conversazione,

Where, flushed with wine and Auld Lang Syne,

You worship at your country's shrine!

William Waldorf Astor

HOW blest a thing it is to die
For Country's sake, as bards have sung!
How sweet "pro patria mori,"
(To quote the vulgar Latin tongue);
And yet to him the palm we give
Who for his fatherland can *live*.

Historians have explained to us,
In terms that never can grow cold,
How well the bold Horatius
Played bridge in the brave days of old;
And we can read of hosts of others,
From Spartan boys to Roman mothers.

But nowhere has the student got,
From poet, pedagogue, or pastor,
The picture of a patriot
So truly typical as Astor;
And none has ever shown a greater
Affection for his Alma Mater.

With loyalty to Fatherland
His heart inflexible as starch is,
Whene'er he hears upon a band

The too prolific Sousa's marches;
And from his eyes a tear he wipes,
Each time he sees the Stars and Stripes.

Tho' others roam across the foam
To European health resorts,
The fact that "there's no place like home"
Is foremost in our hero's thoughts;
And all in vain have people tried
To lure him from his "ain fireside."

Let tourists travel near or far,
By wayward breezes widely blown,
He stops at the Astoria,
"A poor thing" (Shakespeare), "but his own;"
And nothing that his friends may do
Can drag him from Fifth Avenue.

The Western heiress is content
To scale, as a prospective bride,
The bare six-story tenement
Where foreign pauper peers reside;
But men like Astor all disparage
The so-called Morgan-attic marriage.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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