

Notches on The Stick

The Shepherd Magnifies His Gift, and is Famous.

"In Edam's vale the tuneful Thomson sang;
The Shepherd decked on Ettrick Shaws his bower."

So sang Thomas Latio, in his delightful poem of old times. "The School Examination," pointing to the Scottish haunts sacred to the poets; how "artless Allan" sprang from the "bleak Lead hills," and how Ferguson came to his power in the haunts of "auld Reakie; how Campbell "graced the happy hour" in St. Mungo, and how "by fair Kinross Michael Bruce sought the lyric gold." But none were more remarkable than the Shepherd. How he "decked in Ettrick Shaws his bower," let his cheerfully egotistic journal tell us.

"In 1801, believing that I was then become a grand poet, I most sapiently determined on publishing a pamphlet, and appealing to the world at once. Having attended the Edinburgh market one Monday with a number of sheep for sale, and being unable to dispose of them all, I put the remainder into a park until the market on Wednesday. Not knowing how to pass the interim, it came into my head that I would write a poem or two from my memory, and get them printed. The thought had no sooner struck me than it was put in practice; and I was obliged to select, not the best poems, but those that I remembered best. I wrote several of these during my short stay, and gave them all to a person to print at my expense; and having sold off my sheep on Wednesday morning, I returned to the forest. I saw no more of my poems until I received word that there were one thousand copies of them thrown off. I knew no more of publishing than the man in the moon; and the only motive that influenced me was the gratification of my vanity by seeing myself in print. All of them were sad stuff, though I judged them to be exceeding good. Notwithstanding my pride of authorship, in a few days I had discernment enough left to wish my publication heartily at the devil, and I had hopes that long ago it had been consigned to eternal oblivion, when, behold! a London critic had, in malice of heart, presented a copy, and quoted liberally out of it last year, to my intense chagrin and mortification.

Hogg was by William Laidlaw, introduced to Sir Walter Scott; and by his advice and encouragement he profited in succeeding adventures. This help he recognized in some lines complimentary to the "Border Minstrel," at the conclusion of the "Queen's Wake,"—with some deprecation of Scott's former attempts to dissuade him from his devotion to poetry:

"Blest be his generous heart for aye!
He told me where the relic lay;
Pointed my way with ready will,
Afar on Ettrick's wildest hill;
Watched my first notes with curious eye,
And wondered at my minstrelsy;
He little weened a parent's tongue
Such strains had o'er my cradle sung."

[We have omitted to notice how the Shepherd's mother, like the mother of Burns, had charmed the evening hours for her household, and her position, in particular, with the wondrous lore of fairydom,—brownies, kelpies, spunkies, and all the mystic people of the Scotch wilderness,—as well as with ancient legends, and the Border Minstrelsy, in which Scott, and others became so interested. But to the rest of our quotation; which, it is said, grieved Scott, that his friendly counsel should so have been made public, and taken so poignantly to heart by him to whom it was given. Unhappily, such advice is apt to be resented, as possibly proceeding from envy, or want of faith in the aspirant's ability, and, in the end, it is never found of much avail.]

"But when, to native feelings true,
I struck upon a chord was new;
When by myself I gan to play,
He tried to wile my harp away.
Just when her notes began with skill,
To sound beneath the southern hill,
And twine around my bosom's core,
How could we part forevermore?
'Twas kindness all—I cannot blame—
For bootless is the minstrel's flame;
But sure a bard might well have known
Another's feelings by his own!"

Surely it was neither modest in the Shepherd nor just to the kindly Sir Walter to say in eff. et.,—As soon as I entered on a poetic province peculiar to myself, he tried to beguile me from it, in order that he might cultivate it without a rival. If any one of all the literary set at Edinburgh, was the imitator or follower, it was not Scott, but Hogg,—who was always full of wounded vanity in reference to literary matters.

His first appearance in a literary periodical was with the publication of "The Mistakes of a Night," in the Scot's Magazine, in Oct. 1794. His "Mountain Bard" appeared in 1807, the success of which was augmented by the recommendation of Scott.

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This together with his "Treatise on the Diseases of Sheep," realised him the sum of £300; with which he was able to purchase a farm in Dumfriesshire. But he was successful in none of his worldly schemes. It seems as if nature had said to her peculiar children—You have enough to reap your harvest of eye and heart; you shall not see your rye and oats flourish, nor shall you be prospered in your sheep and cattle. You have much; you cannot have everything. So she seemed to say very plainly to Burns; this was her ultimatum, it would seem to the shepherd. Three years sufficed to ruin him financially, and to return him crestfallen to Ettrick, where, it is said, his neighbors looked coldly on him. They seemed to say,—Thou fool, who has squandered thy substance on a stock farm, and comest back to us for employment:—and no man hired him. In his despair as a shepherd, he revived as a poet, went to Edinburgh, and threw himself upon his pen. [Feb. 1810].

The weekly literary paper, The Spy, continued for something less than a year required a better manager than himself. All he did in the way of literature, whether it were "musical farce" "musical drama" ended in insolvency, until he published [1813] "The Queen's Wake." This was immediately successful, lifting him to the height he had long dreamed of reaching; the cry of praise was heard from many a tongue,—and no marvel. It was happy alike in conception and execution, and contained some of the purest poetry that had been produced in that era. It comprised a series of legendary tales and ballads, strung together by a connective thread of rhyme like that in the "Tales of a Wayside Inn," by Longfellow. These are supposed to have been said or sung by Scotland's native bards to Mary Queen of Scots, during a royal wake held at Holyrood, that there might be an opportunity to disclose

"The wondrous powers of Scottish Song." The man who wrote this has claim to a high place in the Scottish Pantheon. But the matchless jewel of the whole is "Kilmeny." It is as rare a legend in its way as that which was wrought into Tam O' Shanter. The tradition is of "a beautiful cottage maiden, who disappears for a time, and returns home again, but, as it were, glorified and not of the earth. She has, for her purity, been transported to the land of spirits and bathed in the river of immortal life. But Kilmeny, 'longing once more to revisit the earth and her kindred at home,' is permitted to return, to the surprise of her mother and kindred:

"Kilmeny, Kilmeny, where have you been?
Lang hae we sought bath bolt and dean;
By inn, by ford, and greenwood tree,
Yet you are hale and fair to see,
Where gat ye that jup o' the lily sheen?
That bonny snood o' the birk sae green?
And these roses, the fairest that ever were seen?
Kilmeny, Kilmeny, where have you been?"

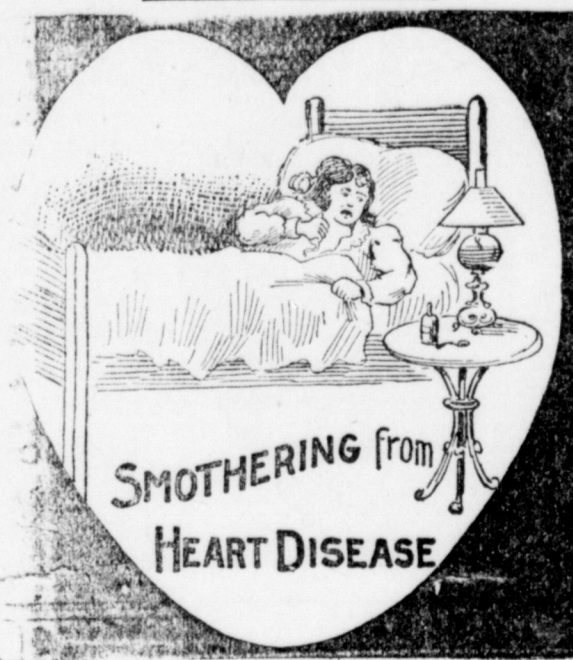
"But on earth the spell of heaven was upon her. All loved, both man and beast, the pure and spiritual Kilmeny; but earth could not detain her."
"When a month and a day had come and gone,
Kilmeny sought the greenwood wene;
There laid her down on the leaves so green,
And Kilmeny on earth was never mair seen.
But O the words that fell from her mouth
Were words of wonder and words of truth;
But all the land were in fear and dread,
For they kenned na whether she was living or dead
It was na her name, and she couldna remain;
She left this world of sorrow and pain;
And returned to the land of thought again.

Pure this is as the dew-drop; delicate as a wind-flower; full of rarest most poetic suggestion. This is its meaning; "that purity of heart makes an earthly creature a welcome denizen of heaven; and the tone and imagery are all fraught with a tenderness and grace that are as unearthly as the subject of the legend." No wonder if the poem ran rapidly through many editions, and if it recommended him to Blackwood, as his future publisher, and brought him into contact and upon familiar terms with many of the literary men of his time. Yet, with all his complacency and satisfaction, there were some seeming slights, exceedingly irksome to him. He says that Jeffrey never noticed the poem till it had got into the third edition, and that he never paid attention to any of his after writings. He supposes Jeffrey wished to atone to Anster for some odious comparison between Hogg and himself; but thinks he can contrive to sail his poetic ship without any wind from the prince of reviewers.

"On the appearance of Mr. Wilson's 'Isle of Palms,' says the Shepherd, 'I was

so greatly taken with many of his fanciful and visionary scenes, descriptive of bliss and woe, that it had a tendency to derelict me occasionally of all worldly feelings. I reviewed this poem, as well as many others in a Scottish review then going in Edinburgh, and was exceedingly anxious to meet with the author; but this I tried in vain for the space of six months. All I could learn of him was that he was a man from the mountain of Wales, or the west of England, with hairs like eagle's feathers and nails like birds' claws, a red beard, and an uncommon degree of wildness in his looks. Wilson was then utterly unknown in Edinburgh except slightly to Scott who never introduces any one person to another, nor judges it of any avail. However, having no shirt left, I sat down and wrote him a note, telling him that I wished much to see him, and if he wanted to see me, he might come and dine with me at my lodgings in the road of Gabriel, at four. He accepted the invitation, and dined with Grieva and me; and I found him so much a man according to my own heart, that for many years we were seldom twenty-four hours asunder when in town. I afterwards went visiting him, staying with him a month at his seat in Westmoreland, where we had some curious doings among the gentlemen and poets of the lakes." He had now met the man who was destined to give the Shepherd quite as great a vogue as he had attained by his own most successful writings.

PASTOR FELIX.



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IN PRISON AND OUT.

The Strange Sensation of Prisoners Upon Obtaining Liberty.

How does it seem to come out of prison after many years of confinement? Nobody can answer, unless it be those who have experienced it. The West Lebanon Gazette quotes the talk of Warden Harley, of the northern penitentiary, a kind-hearted man, who says that after a convict has been in prison for twenty years it is often a cruelty rather than a mercy to pardon him out.

"There are exceptions," Mr. Mr. Harley says, "but the rule is that such prisoners have no friends in the outside world, and soon find themselves miserable and longing again for prison. One such exception is that of a man who was in prison for murder, and was recently pardoned by Governor Matthews. He had served twenty-nine years on a life sentence. I received a letter from him the other day. He is in Nebraska with his brother, and is bubbling over with gratitude.

"Sometimes a small favor granted to a prisoner appears a great one to the poor fellow who is cut off from the outside world. The other day I asked a 'lifer' from Tippecanoe County, who has been in prison twenty-nine years, if he had ever seen a street-car. He said no. 'I will show you one,' I said, and took him outside the prison walls. He was all of a tremble when the car came by.

"Two dogs were running past at the same time. He was greatly interested in the dogs. 'How beautiful they are!' he exclaimed. As a matter of fact, they were the commonest of curs. 'Why,' said he, 'those are the first dogs I have seen for fifteen years!' Fifteen years ago,' he said, meditatively, as if calling up an exceedingly choice and pleasant recollection, 'I saw a little dog one day in the prison-yard.'

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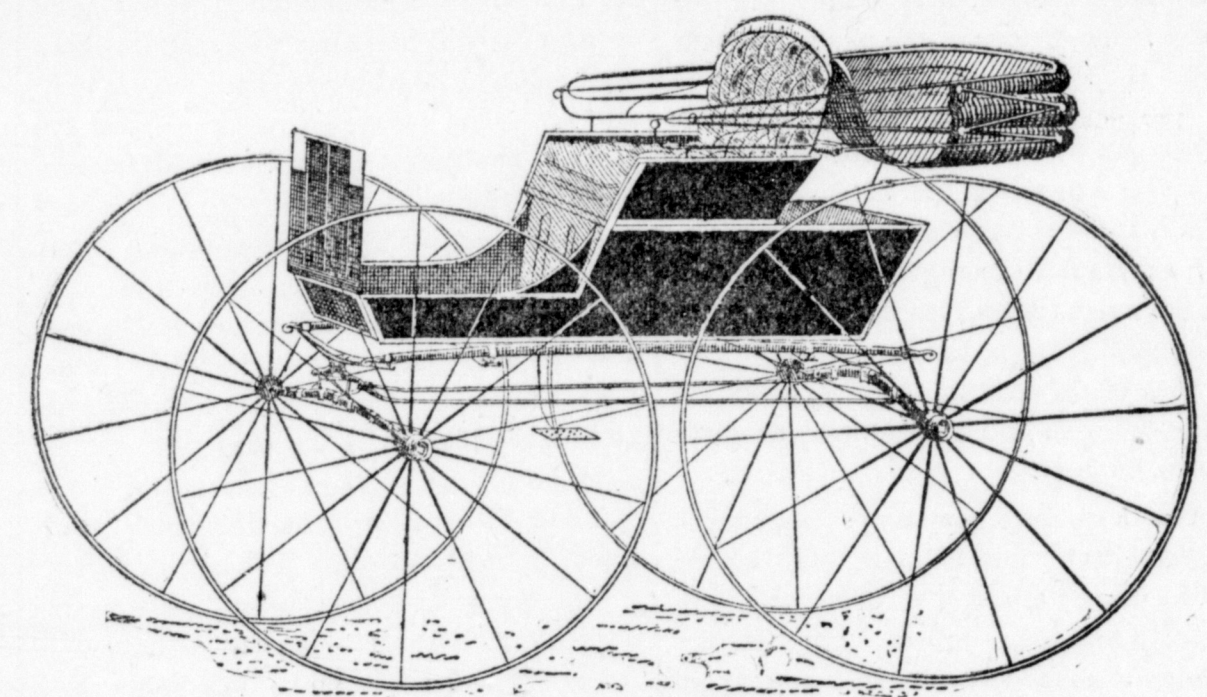
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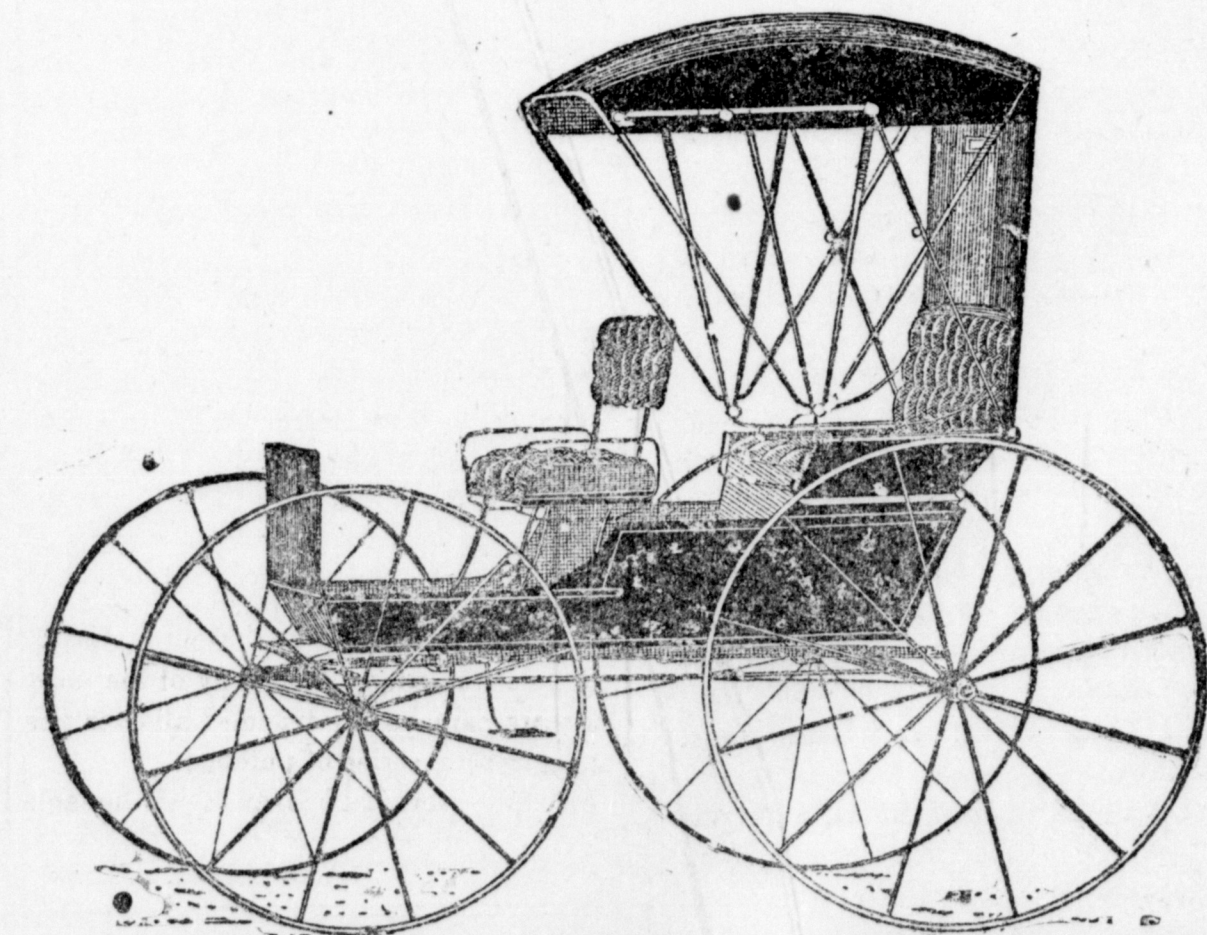
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