

RENWICK IN THE COTTAGE OF JOHN BROWN  
OF PRIESTHILL.

NOVEMBER, 1683.

A SKETCH.

1.

NOVEMBER winds are loud and chill  
Round thy roof-tree, lone Priesthill !  
Earth is wound in her shroud of snow,  
And the clouds toss to and fro.  
All around the moorland's rim  
Day is closing dungeon-dim ;  
Scarce doth twilight intervene,  
Night at once engulfs the scene :  
Storm and darkness, fear and danger,  
Woe's me for the homeless stranger !

But in Priesthill's humble dwelling,  
While without the storm is swelling,

The hearth-stone glows with cheerful heat  
From well-dried turf and fragrant peat ;  
In midst the candle-coal is set,  
And flames with many a lambent jet.  
The shepherd lads and maidens fair  
With busy hands the wool prepare,  
And caird and spin the white and black  
For hoddin' gray to ploughman's back.  
The mother, meek and sweet of face,  
With matron charms and inbred grace,  
Sits with her first-born on her knee,  
Singing her artless lullaby !  
Her little step-child, Janet, dear  
As daughter of her own she were,  
With flaxen ringlets waving light  
Around a brow so lily white,  
And blue eyes laughing to a cheek  
Where rosebuds blow so fresh and sleek,  
Sometimes with demurest art  
Awhile she acts the housewife's part,  
Then, dancing off with nod and beck,  
Hangs on her new-found mother's neck.

Old Colly basking in the blaze,  
Well hast thou spanned the heights and braes,

And threaded through the whirling drift,  
By rough moss-hag and craggy clift,  
And homeward brought the bleating herd,  
While scarce from the door thy master stirred.  
Such human forethought moves in thee,  
And more than human constancy !

With sudden start he pricks his ears ;  
Is it his master's step he hears ?  
Some hours ago he crossed the heath,  
Regardless of the frost-wind's breath,  
The sweets of Gospel truth to shed  
Around a neighbour's dying bed ;  
'Tis nigh the time of his return.  
No ! stranger feet are hither borne ;  
For Colly growls in under tone,  
Mingling with the night-wind's moan,  
And guards the door with sentinel's frown ;  
But Janet kindly pats him down,  
And hies her boldly forth to see  
Who there in such a night should be.  
She soon returns, with looks so bland,  
Leading a stranger by the hand,  
Whose tatter'd garb and feeble form  
Seem all unfit to bide the storm.

She guides him to her father's chair,  
Whilst those within their tasks forbear,  
Each to bestow, in their degree,  
Some mark of hospitality.

The goodwife gives him welcome cheer,  
For all in need find welcome here,  
The wanderer's home, a resting sweet  
To wayfaring and wearied feet ;  
And here the poor make daily moan,  
And daily leave their benison.  
The young from hill and dale repair,  
Here is their school and house of prayer ;  
Here oft the dead in sin have leapt,  
And tears of dawning hope been wept,  
And pierced and bleeding souls been bound,  
And sliding feet new strength have found ;  
And the saints of God, in trial and fear,  
Seek the Urim and the Thummim here !

But with her welcome doubts arise ;  
For troubled times breed jealousies,  
And villain spies on every hand  
Glide like serpents through the land.  
In cities, midst the throng of men,  
In furthest nook and loneliest glen,

On the sea where the good ships fly,  
In the haven where they lie,  
To the far sequestered cot,  
Where roaming beggar travels not,  
In bogs which scarce the bitterns haunt,  
On steeps that know not bush or plant,  
Through tangled forest, pathless waste,  
Where the coney ne'er was chased,  
By the day which blazons all,  
Under midnight's deepest pall,  
At the selfsame table fed,  
Harboured in the selfsame bed,  
They lurk and creep, and watch and mark,  
Strike unseen, and shoot i' the dark,  
And follow still, with bloodhound's scent,  
The children of the Covenant!  
Oft they take Devotion's guise,  
And, Judas-like, betray their prize.  
Thus, rob'd like minister of light,  
Satan plies his ancient spite!

When terror stalks by dale and town,  
Well may the wife of godly Brown  
Feel some misgivings at the sight  
Of unknown guest in such a plight,

With haggard mien and uncouth dress ;  
 Is this from guile or wretchedness ?  
 Deep in her memory hath she stored  
 Peden's dark foreshadowing word,  
 When she and her partner plighted their faith  
 By the mountain-stream to be one till death :  
 " Bridegroom ! cherish well thy bride !  
 Bride ! rejoice thee at his side ;  
 But keep the linen clean and meet  
 To be a martyr's winding-sheet."

To hide the throbbings of her heart,  
 And the tear that to her eye would start,  
 She rocks her first-born on her knee,  
 And sings his evening lullaby,  
 Some antique snatches, quaint and wild,  
 That oft have stilled the cottar's child.

#### THE MOTHER'S SONG.

" Hush thee, baby ! hush thee,  
 Till the morning break !  
 Sweetly may'st thou slumber,  
 Softly may'st thou wake !  
 Hush, my little baby,  
 Till the morning break !"

“ Where’s the way, mother ?

Whither shall I go ? ”

“ Stay at home, my darling !

The hills are deep with snow ;  
And bitter through the hawthorn  
The blasts of winter blow. ”

“ Where are all the heather-bells  
That daddie brought to me ? ”

“ Spring will come, my bonny bird !  
With flowers upon the lea,  
And big a bower by yon burn-side  
For the linnet and for thee ! ”

“ Hush thee, baby ! hush thee,  
Till the morning break !  
Sweetly may’st thou slumber,  
Softly may’st thou wake !  
Hush, my little baby,  
Till the morning break ! ”

“ Caird the black, and caird the white,  
Weave the speckled gray !  
Garment meet for man to wear  
Through his chequered day ;  
But they who wear’t with patience  
Shall shine in bright array ! ”

"Hush thee, baby! hush thee,  
     Till the morning break!  
 Sweetly may'st thou slumber,  
     Softly may'st thou wake!  
 Come, sweet spring!  
 And sweet lark sing,  
     And thy nest in the moorland make!  
 The lambs shall leap,  
 Where the blaeberreries peep,  
     And softly my baby shall wake!"

## II.

The stranger mark! how altered now!  
 Whence the flush upon his brow,  
 And the flush upon his cheek,  
 And tears that more than language speak?  
 As the quick'ning breath of morn  
 Rustles through the mountain thorn;  
 So, whilst the mother's voice is stealing  
 O'er his ear, all thought and feeling  
 Thrill beneath that homely ditty,  
 Her cradle-song of love and pity!

Fond dreams, lov'd gleams of youth revive:  
 He sees the home by Minnyhive,



Where erst he felt a mother's care,  
Where she would comb his golden hair,  
And sing to him some olden strain,  
"Fair Margaret," or the "Young Tamlane;"  
Or, when the thickening shades came on,  
Some holy history would she con  
By the merry evening fire.  
He sees again his godly sire,  
Remov'd by an untimely blow,  
Like the sheltering oak laid low.  
He kneels with him in prayer, and now  
He wipes the death-dew from his brow;  
But while his tears anew are shed,  
He whispers: "Blessed are the dead!"  
Blithe visions, too, now pass before him,  
Glad sounds of other years come o'er him:  
Dalwhat's melodious murmur swells  
By heath-clad steeps and broomy dells,  
Where oft the wild-brier's bud he sought,  
And caroll'd to the blackbird's note.  
O blissful visions! short relief  
To bosoms crushed by wrongs or grief,  
A balsam even, for the time,  
To the conscience gnaw'd by crime!  
Why so swiftly pass away?  
Come not at all, or ever stay!

Delusions all ! unreal and vain !  
No, not in vain ; for still remain  
The blest ideas thus impress'd,  
Which, finding here no place of rest,  
Seek it in the realms above,  
Where centre perfect truth and love !

While thus his fancy bee-like skips,  
And honey from each blossom sips,  
The door is open'd : Yes ! 'tis he,  
The master of the family !  
Sweet to his home as summer gale,  
Known and belov'd through all the dale ;  
For all revere, and all obey  
His holy, patriarchal sway.  
Of firm and stalwart frame is he,  
And aspect grave, yet mild and free ;  
His cheek with hardy lustre glows,  
Such as the mountain-breeze bestows ;  
And here and there a furrow's trace  
Flings its shadow o'er his face.  
His locks, now tipp'd with silvery sheen,  
Fall o'er a forehead clear, serene ;  
And his the blue and glintin' eye  
Of Scotland's noblest peasantry.

But as the sun, though sunk from view,  
Still sheds a calm celestial hue  
Upon some lofty mountain's height ;  
So all in him of good and bright  
Which Nature's genial hand supplies,  
The human-strong, the human-wise,  
Is hallowed by a light Divine,  
Streaming from the heavenly shrine.

He greets the stranger, and he gazes,  
The face some deep emotion raises.  
He knows him through his rude disguise,  
A brother's love beams in his eyes ;  
He doffs his bonnet reverently,  
And thus, in tend'rest courtesy,  
His stammering tongue hath found a vent :  
" The Angel of the Covenant  
Take thee underneath his wing,  
And thy feet to safety bring !  
No prince or peer in Christendom  
Were half so welcome to my home !"  
'Tis RENWICK ! Ah ! how changed from him,  
Of rosy cheek and graceful limb,  
Who but a year before had passed  
Some happy days as Priesthill's guest !

Such havoc in so short a space  
Have toil, and thought, and watchfulness,  
Stormy seas, and travel long,  
And adder-stings from the evil tongue,  
And the burning spirit's bane,  
Hours of rapture, months of pain,  
Wrought upon the beauteous youth.  
But deeper insight into truth,  
Peace that passeth human lore,  
Strength and faith unfelt before,  
Calmer, clearer, loftier mind,  
Earthly passions heaven-refined,  
These have come to him instead,  
If the roses from his cheek are fled.

Oh! who can tell the pure delight  
Which shower'd its blessings on that night?  
When heart to heart responsive beat,  
And soul with soul held converse sweet.  
Themes, dearer prized than treasur'd gold,  
The labouring tongue strove to unfold;  
And long-pent feelings found their way,  
Like well-springs in the month of May.  
As husbandman delights to view  
The blade refresh'd with vernal dew;

As the shepherd on the rock  
Counts with joy his spreading flock,  
Free from taint, and fleecy fair ;  
As the nighted traveller,  
Lost within the forest maze,  
When first the morning meets his gaze,  
Forgets his weary wandering  
To hear the lark and merlin sing,  
While the village chanticleer  
Proclaims some place of shelter near :  
Such, yea, far exceeding this,  
Were those joys of holiness  
Which around that household shone,  
On their hill-side bleak and lone,  
While the youthful priest and the shepherd saint  
Spoke with heavenliest ravishment  
Of God's long dealings with the land,  
And the wonders of His hand !  
O'er those who spake and those who listen'd  
The Rainbow of the Covenant glisten'd !

The pious host, with speech benign,  
Where love and wisdom both combine,  
Himself by sharp experience taught,  
Returns his every inmost thought,

And, like a stream, receives impress'd  
Within a clear and glassy breast,  
Those eddying joys and fears which roll  
In Renwick's more impassioned soul.  
The lowlier acts of household care  
The goodwife and her maidens share.  
She now prepares their evening meal;  
The shepherd lads, with modest zeal,  
Bring forth their holiday attire,  
And give whate'er his wants require;  
The maidens stooping, homely, neat,  
Bring water for his aching feet;  
Whilst little Janet's failing eye  
Folds at length in dreams of joy,  
With her head so lovingly  
Pillow'd on the stranger's knee,  
On her parted lips a smile  
Enough his sorrows to beguile.  
Unearthly splendours light his eye,  
His soul is lost in ecstasy:  
Back as in a swoon he sinketh,  
But his soaring spirit drinketh  
At the crystal fount of life,  
Pure from human sin and strife,  
Where the shadow never flew,  
Where the earth-wind never blew,

Where it flows in ebbless tide  
From eternal springs supplied !

Peace with you all, O household blest !  
Peace with you all, and heavenly rest !  
Be peace and rest vouchsafed a while,  
Not to relax, but nerve for toil !  
A tempest lies before you all,  
Already deep to deep doth call ;  
But with your sufferings ye shall find  
The valiant and submissive mind.  
And now your record is on high,  
Your recompense is in the sky ;  
And what ye sought not shall be given,  
Fame wide as is the cope of heaven.  
Your land, though late, shall know your worth,  
And boast the honour of your birth,  
When prince and warrior are forgot,  
Or known but as a nation's blot,  
Then Brown and Renwick's fame shall be  
Remember'd in our history.  
When battlefield and palace gay  
Sink in oblivion and decay,  
The Patriot and the Christian still  
Shall pilgrims be to loved Priesthill !