

THE MESSAGE OF THE BEE.

THE humble bee is hiding
In the blossom's golden cells;
He, and he only, can tell me
Where the queen of the fairies dwells.

He is out on a royal message,
He has her high command
To bring his tribute of honey
To her table in fairyland.

And this is why he is ranging
From blossom to blossom to-day;
He is busy making nectar
For the lips of elf and fay.

He will carry the golden treasure
To all their kith and kin,
To a bank in a wood where a portal
Will open to let him in.

This tiniest of portals
Lies hid as violets hide,
Two blue-bells stand as sentries,
They guard it on either side.

He will hum, as he enters, the password,
And they—they will nod in the sun,
Then stand again to their duty,
And this is all that is done.

I, too, have seen this portal,
And a child can understand
That there is no other doorway
To the realms of fairyland.

KILLIN.

THE little village sleeps to-day,
Save but for children at their play.
The white clouds show their snowy breast
Above Glen-Aylmer's grassy crest.
And far away on Corsencon
A single shadow rests alone;
While Nith, shrunk into quietude,
Hath not one voice to make one brood.
All rests to-day; and as I lie,
With idle heart and idle eye,
I dream, and as I dream I hear
The brawling Dochart in my ear.

He sings; and all the silence fills
With outlines of the Highland Hills.
I smell the heather which they wind
About them, as in wish to bind
Upon their brows a purple wreath
To veil their craggy fronts beneath.
Ben Lawers looks upon Loch Tay
Hid half in mist, and far away
Ben More uprears his shoulder grim,
As if the whole belonged to him.
And farther on Schiehallion seeks
A misty mantle for his peaks.
These rise, but ever in my ear
The angry Dochart I can hear.

Thou river rushing on to seek
A barrier for thy wrath to wreak
Itself upon, wert thou the source
Of all that sullen fire and force
That leapt within the veins of those
Who held their own and slew their foes?

KILLIN

Perchance they took their stubborn pride
And thirst of rapine from thy tide!
Vain question! they have passed away
From Highland glen and Highland brae,
And take their sleep by thee, nor hear
Thy torrents thunder in their ear.

There, too, amid the hills they deem
That Fingal rests and dreams his dream,
The mists descend, and leave a trace
Of dews upon his resting-place.
They weep soft tears upon the stone
That seem but shed for him alone;
Meet place it is for Highland chief,
The wild winds lift their voice of grief,
And wail for him who rests beneath
Their coronachs of gloom and death.
For fancy sees the warrior grim
Still lying huge of arm and limb,
His broadsword resting by his side,
Whose keen edge shone the foeman's pride.
His white beard like a mantle holds
His heart within its snowy folds.
Vain fancy!—sheath and steel are rust,
And he himself is into dust.
No more the battle-slogans rend
The air, nor from the hills descend
The rushing clans with sudden cry,
The fire of conflict in their eye,
Before the thunder of whose way
The lightnings of the broadsword's play.
All, all have gone, and sunk and still
And peaceful as the windless hill,
Upon whose side they take their rest,
The heather waving o'er their breast.

Thou Highland girl that dwellest by
 The Lochy, with its softer sigh,
 Far from thy gentle life be still
 The tempest of the cloudy hill;
 The winds of heaven be in thy hair,
 With fragrance of the heather there;
 Thy dark, sweet eyes be still as bright,
 With all their charms of liquid light.
 Quick be thy foot, and light thy heart,
 And thou thyself be still a part
 Of all that calm and beauty seen
 In wood and strath, in glen and green.
 And in the night when slumber brings
 Its dreams to thee of happy things
 That, bending, touch with finger tips
 The parted crimson of thy lips;
 Still may there murmur through them all,
 The gentle Lochy's rise and fall.

O, friend of mine,* to whom I owe
 What only I myself can know,
 Those scenes grow very dear to me,
 Because I looked on them with thee,
 And thou—dost thou remember still
 The sunshine warm on loch and hill;
 The clouds that rose within our ken,
 Like messengers from Ben to Ben;
 The headlong waterfalls that broke
 To die in drifts of spray and smoke;
 The long still nights when darkness came,
 With far-off murmurs through the same,
 The lonely bird that, somewhere, smote
 The silence with a single note;
 The hush of streams whose monotone
 Drew down the silence as its own?

* Mr Andrew Stewart, editor of "The People's Friend."

KILLIN

Thou dost; and those long walks in which
The way grew light with quips of speech,
For Ossian's song in parody
Was heard; and many a travestie
Of sober rhyme was made to play
Its part to fit our holiday.

How those three summer days come back,
With all their sunshine in their track.
And Highland lake and hill and sky
Grow dear to all my dreaming eye,
But dearer each and all to me
Because I looked on them with thee.

A DAY DREAM ON THE RAIL.

I STOOD upon the four-foot way
Amid the haunts I knew so well,
The sunshine of an April day
Was over all with tender spell.

The primrose and the violet,
That little fairy of the grass,
On sloping hill and bank were set
To show which way the spring did pass.

Across the river, from a tree
Whose top was in the balmy air,
A mavis sang—he sang to me—
And field and wood grew still more fair.

I stood like one who dreams, nor cares
To mingle with the life around,
But lives within the realms he shares,
And will not overstep their bound.

A DAY DREAM ON RAIL

For all my inner life was stirred,
As in the golden time of thought,
Till, as I live, again I heard
The cuckoo sing his double note.

It came behind me from the hill,
The voice and spirit of the spring;
And I, to keep the magic still,
I did not turn to hear him sing.

Why shatter all the simple creed
Of boyhood? for I held it then
That he—this bird—came at their need,
And brought the gift of spring to men.

That he was mateless, only he—
A single voice, a double call
That sent a thrill of prophecy,
With coming summer through it all,

That were he seen by mortal eye
The charm would fail, and there would pass
A brighter glory from the sky,
A greener colour from the grass.

An idle thought perchance to think,
And yet the pity of it seems
The man should rise and snap the link
And strike the boy from out his dreams.

The loss is his; for, looking back
Through all the years he left behind,
A sunshine settles on the track
His footsteps never more will find.

And all along the four-foot way,
That sunny day in perfect spring,
The past was with me like the day,
And lent my thoughts their swiftest wing.

A DAY DREAM ON RAIL

And I looked back, and, looking, felt
This manhood, with its rougher strife,
Pass, as the summer mists, and melt
In that clear light of earlier life.

And I once more upon the line
Stood as a toiler; heard the crash
Of engines; saw their muscles shine
Like sunshine through the steam and flash;

Knew the red secret of the birth
Of those huge things that pant and beat,
Who toil for men, and span the earth,
And shriek for spaces for their feet.

They gave me songs to sing: I sang
Their splendours as they flashed along;
The roar of wheels on rails that rang
And shot their echoes through my song;

The white smoke-serpents, coil on coil,
That shot up at each monster's will—
And I was happy then, for toil
Was sweet, but song was sweeter still.

I heard it through the eager day
In whispers, but when all the night
Fell, and the stars were on their way,
It broke into a keen delight.

And then I sang: my songs may be
Of simple note and feeble wing;
The bird that sits upon the tree—
He pipes though no one hears him sing.

And yet it were a pleasant thought
When death has flung his mists between,
To think that in these fields should float
A little touch of what has been.

A memory for friends to keep
 Till, as the quick, sad years go by,
 They, too, pass onward to their sleep,
 And dying with them as they die.

JENNY.

I SAT—in church, of course—and heard
 The parson thunder forth his sermon.
 “The text!” you say—well that’s absurd,
 You ask me what I am not firm on.
 But *entre nous*, remember that,
 For I am half afraid of libel,—
 My text was in the pew, where sat
 Sweet Jenny busy with her Bible.

Of course, you saw that charming girl—
 By Jove, those eyes of hers were witching;
 And then what lips! and, O, each curl—
 No wonder that I thought of hitching.
 Had I been with her in the pew
 And touched her hand, without a falter
 I should have risen full in view
 And thought I stood before the altar.

The sermon might be good or bad;
 Good, I should say—I knew the preacher—
 But really, Jenny, though it’s sad
 To say it, was my only teacher.
 I looked into her soft brown eyes,
 And, as I saw their gospels beaming,
 I thought of far-off Paradise,
 And dreamt, and Eve was in my dreaming.

JENNY

What meetings we had by the stile,
When sunset made the earth a glory:
The clasp of hands, the tender smile,
The whisper and the old, old story.
Oh! love and youth, and all the power
That beats strong as a wave that's tidal;
The golden ring, the orange flower,
And all the passion of the bridal.

I saw myself a happy man,
And rich, though owning scarce a penny;
A home that love itself might plan,
An angel in it—that was Jenny.
Around her all the air took light,
She was, as Patmore sings divinely—
“The Angel in the House,” so bright,
And ruling my affairs benignly.

Years came and went, and all the rest,
And, though my hair was growing thinner,
I had that curve about the vest
Which spoke of the domestic dinner.
Gone, too, the ways that youth will range,
Ere manhood brings us to an anchor,
And in their place—no bad exchange—
A growing balance with my banker.

My lot was such from day to day,
That any little whiff of trouble
But came to make, when passed away,
My simple, sober pleasures double.
I had—but here there came a flaw
That upset my fancy's cradle,
I turned, and at my elbow saw
A douce Scots elder with the ladle.

JENNY

Gone was my dream that was so sweet;
I felt just like that Eastern fellow
Who kicked his basket with his feet
And lost what nearly turned him yellow.
Well, well, "we are such stuff," supply
The rest yourself—I took a penny,
And in the ladle with a sigh
Dropped it, and all my hopes of Jenny.

AN OLD-WORLD BALLAD.

I LIE an' look doon on the clachan,
This best o' a' simmer days,
An' doon by the side o' the burnie
The lasses are bleachin' their claes.
I hear them lauchin' an' daffin',
I catch the skance o' their feet
As they rin wi' their cans for mair water
To jaw on the snaw o' the sheet.
Then ane starts liltin' an' singin',
And the sang comes up to the heicht;
It's a' aboot lads and their lasses
That coort in the lown o' the nicht;
The lads an' the lasses coortin'
Aneath the spread o' the birk,
Or castin' sheeps' een at ilk ither
As they stan' at the psalms in the kirk.
An' O, but the sang comes bonnie,
On a gliff o' the win' up the brae,
An' as sweet as the scent in the meadows
When fowk are teddin' their hay.

AN OLD-WORLD BALLAD

Then anither ane sang, but her singin'
 Brocht the warm tears into my een;
For an auld-warld sorrow was sabbin'
 In an' oot through the words atween.

A sang o' a deid knicht lyin'
 At the back o' a rickle o' stanes;
An' you heard the deid grass rustle,
 An' the sugh o' the win' through his banes.

A licht dee'd oot o' the sunshine,
 A shadow fell doon on the hill;
The win' held its breath for a moment,
 An' the grass beside me was still.

A' this by an unkenned singer,
 An' O, but the heart was sair
For the knicht away in the muirlands,
 An' the grass growin' up through his hair.

How strange that an old-world ballad,
 Away far back in the years,
Should still have the same sad magic,
 To touch the source of our tears.

An' a' this is mine as I listen,
 This best o' a' simmer days;
Hearin' naething ava' but the liltin'
 O' lasses thrang bleachin' their claes.

THE CHURCHYARD TREE.

GREY tree within the churchyard old,
 Why stir thy leaves to-night?
Why moan thy branches in the cold
 And shake as with affright?

THE CHURCHYARD TREE

The grass grows rank, and dull decay
Eats with its mossy stains
The stones where names are worn away
By centuries of rains.

But there has come no change for thee
Save what each season forms;
Broad summer ever fair to see,
And winter with its storms.

Thou, too, hast seen the young and old
Laid in their last, long rest,
Thy leaves have fallen on their mould
Like blessings on their breast.

And thou hast heard, amid the calm
Of long past Sabbath days,
The preacher's voice, the sound of psalm
That rose in humble praise.

But now instead of psalm on high
Thou hast the curlew shrill,
The bleating of the sheep that lie
Along Glen Aylmer Hill.

The shadow of the sailing cloud,
The long, long summer day,
The whisper of the stream, half loud,
That tinkles on its way.

Grey tree within the churchyard old,
How stir thy leaves to-night,
How moan thy branches in the cold,
Why shake as with affright?

Why should I think of thee within
The narrow eager street,
Who standest far from all the din,
Where every sound is sweet.

THE CHURCHYARD TREE

The rippling streamlet half in view,
The curlew loud and shrill;
The shepherd's sudden whistle to
His helpmate on the hill:

All these are sweet, and I could sleep
Like any wearied child,
Were I but there one day to keep
A tryst amid the wild.

Perchance my early dreams that sunk,
As ships gone down at sea
When the wild waves with hate are drunk,
Might come again to me.

And I should steep myself in rest,
As trees when winds have fled,
And draw the canker from the breast,
The fever from the head.

The thoughts that only come to chill,
As all such thoughts must do,
And fling on lonely stream and hill
A sadder light to view;

A sense of something passed away,
A look that speaks of tears,
Such looks as lovers give when they
Meet after many years.

Come back, come back, O, early dreams,
When love and hope were high;
Come back, thou voice within the streams,
Thou light within the sky.

Touch, as ye touched in days of old,
Each mute though breathing thing;
And wove with sunshine as with gold,
A link from spring to spring.

THE CHURCHYARD TREE

Bring back those hours in which I bent,
And heard in tender awe
Love speak with passionate tones, that sent
A thrill through all I saw.

They come not—nay, will never come—
Though springs bloom to the last;
The voices that I heard are dumb,
They were but for the past.

Grey tree within the churchyard old,
How sound thy leaves to-night!
How moan thy branches in the cold,
And toss in wild affright!

Thou know'st the storm in all its might,
The spring and summer thrills;
And thou hast known the staid delight
That beams along the hills.

But thou hast never known the keen
Wild throbbing of the street,
Nor heard in narrow ways between,
The sound of pitiless feet.

Thou hast not heard the low, sad cry
Of pent-up breathing life;
The rush of passions fierce and high—
The winds of human strife.

Thou hast not known our human fears—
The fears we cannot name;
Nor hast thou felt the doom of tears
That follows wrong and shame.

These must be ours, but thine are still
The murmur of the stream,
The light and shadow on the hill,
The sunshine and the gleam.



Andrew Stewart

From a Photograph

TO MY FRIEND.

*Written by the poet for the toast of the Editor of
"The People's Friend," Mr Andrew Stewart, at
the Dinner and Presentation to Mr James
Nicholson, Glasgow, January 12th, 1895.*

THE years have sped since first we met,
Here, in the city's toil and roar;
Brief space in looking back, and yet,
Those years now number twenty-four.

What changes have they brought to all—
What thoughts that make for higher ends,
What shadows that perforce must fall,
To make us only closer friends.

Perchance this were a fitting time
To gently touch with kindly hand
Those brothers of a band of rhyme
Now silent in the other land.

One in whose soul the city rang *
With throbbings as at fever-heat;
Whose song was as an anvil-clang,
Heard far above the rush of feet.

He, turning from the toil and strife
With half-ignoble thoughts of rest,
Sank when the sun of midmost life
Had scarcely turned to face the west.

Another, keen, and swift, and bold, †
With ready jest and quip to tell—
A bright Mercutio grown old,
He, too, has bidden us farewell.

*Alex. G. Murdoch.

†James Smith.

TO MY FRIEND

And others who have left the light,
The light that death can only stem,
Perchance are with us here to-night,
Because to-night we think of them.

They whisper in our inner ear,
Faint, as befits a spirit tongue,
And far down in our heart we hear,
Their *ave atque vale* sung.

So be it—they have passed, and we,
Who still are forward in the strife,
Must close our thinning ranks, and see
We keep pace in the march of life,

And only halt a space to greet
Some noble brother in the fight;
One to whom worthy praise is meet
As is our honoured guest to-night.

He, too, has seen with eager eye
Truth ready with her trumpet blast;
He too, though falling out to die,
Will grasp his colours to the last.

But I—I wander from my theme—
I turn again, O, friend to thee;
The guider of my early dream,
Whose hand was first held out to me.

For I was all alone—no voice
Had touch of sympathy with mine,
Till through the clang of railway noise
A voice came, and that voice was thine.

It spoke of cheer, it whispered hope
To one who, half afraid to climb,
Stood looking at the rugged slope
Where lay his little field of rhyme.

TO MY FRIEND

And so he strove, well pleased to hear,
From where the railway echoes rang,
His songs had fallen upon thy ear,
And then it was to thee he sang.

The toil was naught; it only made
Song sweeter when the shadows fell,
And all the valleys lay in shade,
And all the hills he knew so well.

Enough; the years have sped along;
For what they brought with them, O friend,
A rough camp-follower of song
Will thank thee to the very end.

THE LILY O' THE BANKS O' CREE.

SAFT fa's the sun on Anwoth Hills
When simmer smiles an' a' is fair;
But what is licht to them or me,
When she I lo'e is bidin' there?
The licht that's in her bonnie een
Is mair than simmer unto me;
Sweet Jenny, pride o' Anwoth Hills,
The Lily o' the Banks o' Cree.

When morning o'er the Solway breaks
In purple smiles, and seas and skies
Touch each in love, and earth again
Becomes a balmy paradise;
A dearer licht to me than a'
Is that which beams frae Jenny's ee;
Sweet Jenny, pride o' Anwoth Hills,
The Lily o' the Banks o' Cree.

THE LILY O' THE BANKS O' CREE

Fu' bonnilie in Kirkdale glen
The primrose peeps frae grassy nook,
An' modestly the violet blows,
As if afraid to meet your look;
But fairer far than ony flower,
By wimplin' burn or grassy lea,
Is Jenny, pride o' Anwoth Hills,
The Lily o' the Banks o' Cree.

A WHIFF OF NATURE.

I STAND alone on the hillside,
The scent of heather about;
I am so free of the city
That I leap and dance and shout.

The curlew and the lapwing,
They look for a moment at me,
Then they whoop and dive together,
For they understand my glee.

I can fancy I hear them singing
As I see them flying along—
“Here is a weary old fellow
Who is still in love with our song.

“Let us sing him our shrillest and wildest,
That it may sink in his heart,
And be with him again in the city
When he turns his face to depart.”

And over moss and moorland,
They swoop and wheel and sing,
Till the very ferns beside me
Begin to quiver and swing.



A Whiff of Nature

J. Campbell Noble, R.S.A

And ever, as if from dreamland,
The wind brings this echo along—
“Here is a weary old fellow,
Who is still in love with our song.”

THE VOICES OF SINGERS.

I HEAR the voices of singers,
Whose songs stir the pulses of men;
They stand on their mountains of vision,
Each answers each other again.

They are rapt in a whirlwind of passion;
They rise white-lipped at a wrong;
The world turns half round to listen,
For they are the eagles of song.

But between the gusts of their music
And the pomp and march of their words
There comes from the depth of the woodland
The chirp and the twitter of birds.

They sing, and their songs are the sweeter
If no one is standing nigh,
For what should they care for us mortals,
When they sing to the earth and the sky.

And I who toil by the wayside,
In the weary dust and heat,
I pause for a moment to listen,
For the singing is soft and sweet.

It breathes of the spirit of gladness,
And sunshine that flickers and plays;
Of streams that chatter and murmur
Through the length of the summer days.

THE VOICES OF THE SINGERS

What of the songs of the singers
That float from the heights above?
What of the songs of the woodlands
That are full of light and of love?
The songs from the mountains of vision,
They thrill my ear and depart,
But the twitter that comes from the woodland
Sinks deep down into my heart.

A WISH.

I WISH my little life had been
In concert with each lowly thing,
To wander where the fields are green
And beating with the pulse of spring.
To feel the summer send its blood
Through all the earth, until my own
Took newer life, and, like a bud,
Burst into blossom fully blown.
To watch the dying of each year,
Not as we sit by dying men,
But knowing winter dull and drear
Would pass, and after life again
To walk through all the changing round
Of seasons till my winter came,
And I had reached the utmost bound
Of life, then sink, as sinks a flame.
And rest within some quiet place,
Where all day long, from day to day,
The seasons as they came would trace
Their certain changes where I lay.