

MEMORIES OF THE PAST

WHEN I repair at eventide to muse on days gone by,
A vision comes before my sight I fain would gratify,
And tell to all, who care to read, the deeds of love and
truth

From out the book of memory, the school book of my
youth.

Some pages may be lost to view and buried past my ken,
While some are marked and underlined to me with
valiant men;

And though my hair be turning grey, my brow be
furrowed deep,

The deeds of those I now record can never fall asleep;
Poor in the wealth the worldling knows, their minds
were rich in lore,

When dealing with their fellows they were honest to
the core.

Historic scenes crowd on my mind, come down from
sire to son,

How Bruce had fought for liberty and Scotland's
freedom won;

For where the famous Bannock Burn meanders to the
sea,

The gallant Bruce took up his stand to set his country
free.

A vile usurper came to crush, enslave our noble land,
But Bruce was there to reckon with and check the foul
demand.

De Bohun had thought to end the strife, and challenged
him to fight,

Bruce waved his battle-axe on high, and spurred his
palfrey light;

They met, De Bohun's fierce charger plunged, Bruce promptly shied the thrust,
When crash! a blow like lightning laid the braggart in the dust.

"Thus perish all who reckon not the prowess of a Scot,
If we have been in chains for years, this day removes the blot.

Be valiant, Scots, keep arm to arm, and close up thigh to thigh,
And rush when slogan shout you hear, to crush the foe or die."

And ere the swelt'ring sun had set o'er fields and meadows green,
The foe was scattered far and wide as they had never been.

The growth of friendship then began that ended Scotland's woe,
By land or sea we now agree to meet the common foe.

Near by the way brave Randolph marched, anew to deck his brow
With chaplet, Bruce declared he'd lost, there stands a village now.

And there, within that hamlet snug a-nestling in the plain,
I often frolicked as a boy (would I were one again!).
A cosy home, with thatch on roof and flowers before the door,

Where woodbine twined to shade the light that shone upon the floor;

There father drove the shuttle swift while weaving tartans fine,

And mother toiled to fill the pirns in days o' auld lang syne.

Though scanty were the earnings, yet contentment reigned around—

O that such love and harmony in every home were found!—

And so within this lowly home one hopeful month of
May

The writer of this retrospect first saw the light of day.
And now, O mother, fondest love! dost thou remember
when

I clean upset thy wheel and pirns? my first deep grief
was then.

The time had come I should receive my usual afternoon,
But no, thine edict had decreed "that a' the milk was
dune."

This episode in early life sets my old heart aglow,
Such wisdom taught me when to speak, and when I
should say "No."

Here would I pause to linger on those happy youthful
days,

And when my sister Nell and I went skelping o'er the
braes,

Or guddled minnows in the burn, or chased the busy
bee,

Or when I trembling stood and watched her climb the
auld haw tree.

Throughout those days of innocence the home was filled
with joy,

The patt'ring feet, the merry laugh, all pleasant, sweet,
and coy;

Six little ones at close of day, including Nell and me,
Would clasp their hands and pray to God beside their
mother's knee:

"The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want. He makes
me down to lie

In pastures green: He leadeth me the quiet waters by."

The Omnipresent heard the prayer, and bore the
parents' load,

Divine the faith that looks in hope and verity to God.

But lo! there's one whose voice is still, that shared our
youthful joy,
Now slumbering 'neath the churchyard green, her soul
without alloy;
Rejoicing now in other spheres beyond life's troubled
sea,
There sheltered from all stormy winds, from disputa-
tions free.

But faces change with changing time, old scenes give
place to new,
The village weavers one by one pass oft before my view.
I've watched lang Jamie, gun in hand, protect his
cherries ripe,
Cowerin' 'neath a berry bush, starlings and blackbirds
snipe;
The boys oft hid behind the hedge, and just as he
took aim
Would clap their hands—off flew the birds, and Jamie
lost his game.
He'd angry stride o'er tattie shaws or cabbages between,
Declaring he would shoot the crew, but not a boy was
seen.
But Jamie was a worthy man; in winter, by the fire,
He built beeskeps wi' eident hand, and laces made of
briar.

Old John, "the laird," with gleeful face, and wrinkles
on his brow—
Behold him in his garden trim—methinks I see him
now,
As by his side he led me forth to view the Wallace
Tower,
And showed me life and beauty in each tiny leaf and
flower.

His eye was bright, his step was firm, tho' agéd
eighty-four,
Yet after this he crossed the deep, and died in Balti-
more.
His grandsire for Prince Charlie's cause fell on
Culloden Moor,
And John, all for the Stewart race, regretted he was
poor.
And near his house there dwelt of old the Lady
Barrowfield,*
And there the Prince had oft repaired by shade of night
concealed.
This lady graced his father's court, exiled in Rome
for years,
And rank and fortune sacrificed with lonely widow's
tears;
Yet still the favoured cause she deemed a just and
righteous claim,
And thus he was a welcome guest, a prince of honoured
name.
Ten daughters had this lady fair, ten comely maids
I ween,
In all the country side around none fairer could be seen.
And one, the charmer of his life, the youngest of the ten,
Might pardoned be although she loved this gallant
among men.
Had they not romped as children romp the royal
walks along,
And made the corridors resound with childish glee and
song?
The gentle flame rekindled when the royal lover came.
In princely hall or peasant's cot the sequel is the same.
The mansion stands, the room is shown where love was
wont to peep,
The corner where the settle stood where oft he lay in
sleep.

*See note on page xvi.

We mourn poor Clementina's fate, who loved as loves
a wife;

Devotion is a mockery when paid for with a life,
Perchance had he but gained the crown—who knows
what might have been?

Yet Nature gave what man denied, for she was aye a
Queen.

And thus old John, with flashing eye, instructed me
of yore,

With stories of the "Forty-Five" from out his ample
store.

Auld Geordie was a favourite that every boy could trust;
His manly form has long ago been crumbled into dust;
But where is he, the spirit man?—a soul can never die—
On seraph wing ascended to a home beyond the sky.
His intellect was sharp and keen, well versed in Bible
lore,

The doings of the Hebrew kings he'd tell you by the
score.

Can I forget the day we met upon the rising hill?
He raised his hand as if to bless, his form erect and still;
Then said, "The tents of Cushan great in sad affliction
lie,

The land of Midian trembled for the Majesty on high;
And may this God, who never fails, His grace to thee
extend,

And fill thy soul with love and truth, till life is at an
end."

No other word he spake, but left me wondering to reflect
On all he said, and if his words with God would have
effect.

The place, his look, the words of truth, sank deep into
my mind,

Their echo comes again to-night, I hear them on the
wind;

The prayer was heard, for now I know since years have
passed away,
The power of God has kept my feet from stumbling
day by day.

There figures too in days gone by a dear old friend
of mine,
Then surely for old Farmer Rob I'll add another line.
I think I see his kindly smile as o'er the fields at play,
We scampered helter-skelter through among the ricks
of hay;
Or in the stackyard of a night at hide-and-seek we ran,
And blind man's buff in winter time with Maggie,
Pate, and Dan,
He warned us ne'er to seek for nests, nor play on
Sabbath Day,
For those we loved would grieve to see their bairnies
gang astray.
Alas! how Time with silent tread his footprints leaves
behind,
Impairs the body, bows the head, and tells upon the
mind;
For Robin's frame grew feeble, and no more he tills
the soil,
The sickle answers not his touch, for he has ceased to
toil.

Now of my village schoolmates, too, a word I have
to say,
And honest John, my champion brave, must figure in
my lay;
For, when a boy, my faithful friend avenged a cruel
wrong,
When one had badgered me to fight though I was not
so strong;

He off his jacket, bared his arm, and dared my foe
to fight,
And cried, "Now, Bill, you stand aside, I will main-
tain your right."
He pummelled him right heartily, my foe soon skulked
away,
And left John victor of the field, a proud, proud boy
that day.
This was an act of friendship—more a brother could
not show—
And may a higher hand than mine, through winter's
wind and snow,
Reward him for his timely aid, and easy make the load
He carries through the valley to the presence of his
God.*

Another friend was Jamie; well do I remember when
We went to learn swimming in the linn at Marion's
glen!
And once from school we played the fab to gather hips
and slaes,
To deck the brows of Meg and Jean, the loves of our
young days.
When verging into manhood to the Volunteers we went,
"Aye ready," was our watchword when on duty we
were bent.
May this be still our watchword, and our path be
straight and clear
Throughout the sterner walks of life, our souls be void
of fear.
Be brave, my comrade, onward march, we soon shall
reach the goal,
Yon stately edifice that's reared, the haven of the soul.

* My friend was on his deathbed when above was penned.

Yet there are others not less dear whose memories are
green,
Their names inscribed upon the stones where they can
now be seen,
Within Saint Ninian's old churchyard, there, mingling
with the dust,
Their souls have gone in triumph to the city of the just;
Awaiting there the final morn, the great, the judgment
day,
When soul with body re-unites to rank in grand array;
No radiant sun to light the scene, the splendour of the
throne
Transcendent in its brightness, as the Master calls
His own;
"Come to my right, ye ransomed ones, from sin, from
sorrow free,
Possess your own inheritance for all eternity."