

THOMAS DANIEL.

ONE of the shyest and most retiring of men, simple and unaffected in his tastes and habits of life, with no desires or ambition beyond ennobling with his humble gift of song the lowly lot he was born into, was THOMAS DANIEL, for long known as “the Buchan Poet”. Born at Easter Auquharney, Cruden, in 1784, he was early inured to the hardships of a life of toil, having at fifteen to “thresh his side and ca’ the plough”, and otherwise discharge the laborious duties of a common agricultural labourer. The perusal of one of the modernised versions of Blind Harry’s “Wallace”, and other bits of our old Scottish classics—then more popular in the rural districts than now, through the itinerant chapmen who carried their rudely printed wares into every clachan—awakened a taste for poetry in young Tom, and sent him back to school to supplement the elements he had acquired in his younger years. Carried off with the volunteer mania, which broke out in the early years

of this century, he entered the ranks of a local corps, and subsequently joined the militia, or, as he calls it, "became a greater soldier", and was discharged at the peace of 1812. There is no truth in the statement frequently made that he fought at Waterloo, for during that time he was at more congenial work—courtship and poesy. After his marriage in 1819, he devoted all his spare hours to regular composition, and it is no small merit in him to find that, in spite of the many difficulties which lay in his path, the want of early training, the scarcity of books, the hardness of his daily toil, he acquired a considerable power of expression both in prose and verse. It was with no small fear and trembling that he first resolved to put a booklet of his verse into the hands of his friends and before the general public; yet when it did come, "Poems, chiefly in the Scottish Dialect, by Thomas Daniel, Easter Auquharney, Cruden—Aberdeen, 1827", turned out a success greater than he ever dreamed of—a success to the tune of twenty pounds! He now devoted a considerable portion of his time to the composition of prose tales, and carried on an extensive intercourse and correspondence with a host of north country bards, who were fain to exchange rhymes with the Buchan poet. A second and enlarged edition of his poems was printed at Peterhead in 1837, had a good reception, was fairly remunerative, and though some of the pieces that appeared in the first edition were left out, it is on the whole a volume that fairly represents the humble aims and simple, unaffected character of "the man of rhyme", as he lived and moved in the obscurity of Easter Auquharney. He had no pretension in his exercise of verse-making beyond the amusement of his own class, and strung together his tales and rhymes, in a language and form at once plain, familiar, and homely. The longest of his pieces—"The Royal Beggar", "The Laird of Ballandrum", and "The Massacre of the Devil"—are stories told much after the manner of "Thrummy Cap", and show in the easy "jog-trot" of their narrative considerable descriptive powers, heightened here and there by faint touches of humour and pleasantry, unrefined perhaps, but natural and genuine. The same hand is seen in true rustic simplicity, in those shorter pieces which treat of "The History of my Life", "Address to the Wind", "To my Old Spade", "On seeing a

Woman Providing Material for a Cloutie Covering", and such-like humble, everyday subjects. We quote from one of these:—

There's some addresses made to men ;
 On beasts, sometimes fouk ware their pen ;
 But here you needna rashly blame,
 Nor count me mad,
 Though I address, in vulgar strain,
 My guid auld spade.

My trusty servant lang thou's been,
 And nae offence to me hast gien,
 Though I wi' you hae aft, ere e'en,
 Been sair forgeskit ;
 To mak' a livin' by your means,
 My health I risk it.

Though ye're sair rubbit now, and worn,
 And baith your corners tightly shorn,
 It would be base o' me to scorn
 Sae good a servant ;
 Sic treatment hardly would be borne,
 Whan nae deservin't.

For mony a day we've toiled thegither ;
 In my regard nane could be sibber ;
 And few, I doubt, whan I consider,
 Deserved sae weel ;
 And wae am I now for anither
 To change my teel.

Though muckle sums I never got,
 Ye fuish me aye the tither goot,
 When I, contented wi' my lot,
 Had fouth o' wark ;
 We keepit eident at the jot
 Whan baith were stark.

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For now ye in some orra nook,
 'Mang orra trock maun lie and jook ;
 Nane for your service now will look
 Upo' the stage ;
 Nor post nor pension now ye'll brook,
 In your auld age.

The labourin' man ye counterfeit,
 His evenin' days ye nicely hit,
 Whan he's nae mair for labour fit
 To please his brither ;
 Frae place and pension he maun flit
 And gie't anither.

Poor wight! nae doubt his labour's sair,
And yet, for a' that, aye been bare,
Till age and want—that ill-matched pair!

Some notice had,
That such a labourer now nae mair
Could wield the spade.

This is an evil right dejectin',
The labourin' man the maist affectin';
By livelihood and kind respectin'
He's left at ance,
To thole the wardle's sour rejectin',
Wi' crazy banes.

Such a hard lot, however, was not in store for the declining years of the poet himself, for through the liberality of Mr. Philip of Yonderton, the downward path was in many respects made more comfortable to him than the upward one had been; and when, in September, 1860, at the advanced age of 76, the humble bard passed away, it was in the midst of friends who loved and cherished him, as much for the pure, unblemished life he had lived, as for the humble gift of song which he had dedicated to the lowly labouring and heavy laden.