THE PORTRAIT.

(Recited by the poet on the occasion of the presentation of his Portrait, painted by W. S. MacGeorge, R.S.A., December 16th, 1891.)

So thanks again; in after years

That down the slope of time will range,
With fading hopes and many fears,
And the slow certitude of change.

When fancy veils with folded wing
Her dreamless eyes, and drops her wand,
She will not stoop to lift and bring
One vision from her fairy land.

When the dull blood takes languid pace, And all the weary brain will tire; When thoughts but kindle up a space, Then flicker like a sinking fire.

When looking backward here we see A narrow strip of dusty road, Now dim within the past, that we From boyhood up to manhood trod.

Along that road were toil and strife
And clang from dusky things of steam,
But still to sweeten all that life
Was something of the poet's dream.

And this made all things sweet and fair,
Touched the hard hours with glowing light;
Made other sunshine in the air,
And moonshine on our dreams by night.

What though those dreams of heart and brain Have fled with all the goals they miss; The toil was nothing—rather gain—When it has led us up to this.

THE PORTRAIT

And so in after years, when I
Am busy with the fading past,
And dreaming as the shadows fly,
Like ghosts, from sinking embers cast,

Then it may be that, looking on
This other self, my thoughts will range
And whisper to myself alone,
"Thou changest," this can never change.

And gazing still at what I see,
The past with all this night shall blend,
Until it fades and leaves with me
The dream-face of each kindly friend.

IN AN ALBUM,

At High Creoch, Gatehouse.

You ask me for a line or two—
I never write in rainy weather—
But I suppose that I must do
My best to string some rhymes together.
What shall it be? "A song," you say,
"Stuck full of doves and all that fashion;"
Alas! I cannot pipe that way,
Or imitate an early passion.

Besides, to really write a song
To some young maiden who could love me;
Two double verses—not too long—
I'd like to have the sun above me.
I'd like to have him shine upon
The paper—and if this were granted,
The rhymes would trip up, one by one,
In order just as they were wanted.



Presentation Portrait

W. S. MacGeorge, R.S.A.

IN AN ALBUM

Of course I own that you have heard
Of poets who were more unbending,
Who could at any time, when stirred,
Spin out their couplets without ending.
All this I grant, but bear in mind
My muse has but a humble pinion,
And cannot reach her higher kind,
Or even sit in their dominion.

But look! against the window pane
The wind like any fiend is dashing;
A steady flood of drenching rain,
Which saves, of course, a lot of washing.
But, for a poet out of town
For holiday, it stands to reason,
To ask his muse to flutter down
'Tis scarcely just the proper season.

Enough, I say, come Muse of mine—
Who, strange to say, has lately missed me—
And give me something in the line
Of Leigh Hunt's charming "Jenny Kissed Me."
A fact! she did, or, let me see,
I think we both laid lips together.
At anyrate, take this from me—
I never write in rainy weather.

THE COVENANTER'S TRYST.

I AM auld an' frail, an' I scarce can gang, Though whiles when I tak' a turn, It's only when the sun blinks oot On the braes by the Vennel Burn.

Then I tak' a look at the Kirkland Heichts, An' up at Glen Aylmer Hill, Then a kinder look at the auld kirkyaird Where the dead sleep soun' an' still.

It's a dear kirkyaird at the fit o' the hills,
For it hauds the dust o' ane
Wha was true as the steel o' his ain gude sword,
An' stood by his kith an' kin.
He tak's his rest, wi' nae stane at his heid,
But I ken that Ane in the skies
Could come this nicht to the auld kirkyaird
An' point oot where he lies.

O, sleep ye soun', bauld Patrick Laing,
As ye ha'e been sleepin' for years;
I am frail and feckless, but still in my heart
Your name is saft wi' my tears.
The sands o' my life are unco few,
An' I ha'ena an hour to tyne,
But I ken fu' weel in the auld kirkyaird
Your dust will welcome mine.

An' there we twa will sleep fu' soun'
Wi' the green grass owre oor head,
Till the years bring roun' the richt to a'
For which Scottish bluid ran red.
Then the Lord will come doon in the licht o' the sun,
When the last sweet day shall dawn;
An' we'll rise frae oor graves, an' He'll meet us there,
An' tak' us baith by the han'.

The Cairn Hills lie on the other side Wi' the sweet Nith rowin' atween, An' there sleep twa leal frien's o' mine—Aul' frien's o' the days that ha'e been.

They are waitin' for me as I for them,
An' it canna langer be,
For I ken that baith ha'e a tryst wi' the Lord,
An' He has a tryst wi' me.

I ken fu' weel that they wait an' wait
Till they hear the trumpet ca',
Then Hair an' Corson will rise an' cry—
"The time has come for us a'."
An' I mysel', a frail, auld man
That unco weel can be spared,
Will meet them baith at the fit o' the hill,
At the tree in the auld kirkyaird.

They dee'd as only men should dee,
For their faither's faith an' hame,
An' they lie wi' their face to the open sky,
Wi' nae touch on their cheek o' shame.
It will a' come richt, when the Lord in his micht,
Comes doon frae heaven to see,
For I ha'e a tryst in the auld kirkyaird,
An' the Lord has a tryst wi' me.

I ha'e heard bauld Cameron preach the Word
On the side o' a Sanquhar brae,
While I sat wi' the sword atween my knees,
As ane wha should watch an' pray;
An' I had my plaid drawn owre my heid,
An' open upon my knee
The Word o' Ane that I brawly kenned
Wad keep min' o' His tryst wi' me.

I ha'e lain in hags when the winter nicht Was bitter an' lang an' cauld,
I ha'e shared my plaid wi' Renwick, too,
When the winds were snell an' bauld:

An' Peden, worn wi' the fire o' the Word, An' thinly cled for the storm— I ha'e lain a' nicht wi' my back to the win' To keep puir Sandy warm.

I ha'e seen dark Clavers turn his back,
On his lips the snarl o' a dog,
An' strike spurs deep in his deein' steed
As he fled frae wild Drumclog;
But I saw him again at Bothwell Brig,
An' the hilt an' point o' his sword
Were red with the blood o' the saints that day
That fell with their trust in the Lord.

I am stiff wi' the midnicht rains that fell As I lay in Blagannoch Moss;
But little I care for a rickle o' banes—
I gi'ed them a' for the Cross.
I ha'e focht the fecht, I ha'e set my faith
Where I trust though I canna see—
It wad be a ferly, atweel, if the Lord
Should fail in His tryst wi' me.

A' the leal, true hearts that were ance wi' me
They are free frae their care an' pain,
An' I am the last that is left to tell
O' the things that are sunk an' gane.
There is peace ance mair, an' I sleep in a bed
As soun' as soun' can be;
But this nicht I fin' that I canna lie doon,
For the Lord has a tryst wi' me.

Could my wife but lay her han' in mine, As she used to do langsyne; But Marion Dryfe is years in her grave, An' a lanely hearth is mine.



A Covenanter

Henry W. Kerr, R.S.A., R.S.W.

But her dochter's weans are unco guid, An' do a' they can for me; I hear her speak an' I hear her fit As they hing about my knee.

Hark! voices are comin' doon in the win',
I ha'e heard them mony a day—
Peden, Renwick, Corson, an' Hair,
An' Cameron shout for the fray.
But higher an' sweeter abune them a'
A Voice keeps cryin' to me—
"John Harkness, hast thou min' o' our tryst
That I set langsyne wi' thee?"

Pit the weans to their bed—gang a' to your bed,
I canna langer be spared;
I hear a Voice that nane o' ye hear,
An' it comes frae the auld kirkyaird.
It's growin' dark—pit some peats on the fire,
An' lay the Book on my knee;
For I ha'e a tryst wi' the Lord this nicht,
An' the Lord has a tryst wi' me.

THE QUICK AND DEAD.

The silent dead go marching down, With not a single banner flown; But if you only bend your ear Their funeral marches you can hear.

They step to time; the march is slow, In deep, thick columns as they go; And over all the still, thick air Falls with a silence everywhere.

THE QUICK AND DEAD

The living meet them on their way, With banners flying, and display; Quick step and sounds of drum and fife Lead out the teaming ranks of life.

You hear the shout of quick command, You see the lifting of a hand; But ever on they press to see The hidden goals of things to be.

The armies of the quick and dead They pass each other; one with tread Joyous to meet the coming fight That looms before their eager sight.

The other marches deep and slow, But ever voiceless as they go, With not a single banner flown, And not a single trumpet blown.

JOHN CROSBIE'S SHOON.

Ane sings the lassie that he lo'es,
Gangs daft about her lips an' een;
Anither, burns, an' heichts, an' howes,
An' a' the places he has seen.
For me, sic things I dinna heed;
But could I lilt an' raise a tune,
I'd do my best to gi'e a screed,
An' try an' sing John Crosbie's shoon.

John Crosbie's shoon, John Crosbie's shoon, A wealth was in John Crosbie's shoon; For wear them late or wear them sune, They never, never wad gang dune. Your toon folk that are unco fine
Maun ha'e thin soles be't wat or fair;
But let a month gang by, an' syne
They ha'e to buy anither pair,
Forbye a dizzen caulds to thole,
An' by the fire to hoast an' croon—
The doctor's fee was unco wee
When ane had on John Crosbie's shoon.

John Crosbie's shoon, John Crosbie's shoon, A wealth was in John Crosbie's shoon; For wear them late or wear them sune, They never, never wad gang dune.

Aboot their shape he didna care,
For that he never fashed his thoom;
A' that he wanted to be there
Was rowth o' ease an' rowth o' room.
What though the taes were no' alike,
Ane maybe square, the ither roun',
Ye had nae corns to mak' ye fyke,
When ye had on John Crosbie's shoon.

John Crosbie's shoon, John Crosbie's shoon, A wealth was in John Crosbie's shoon; For wear them late or wear them sune, They never, never wad gang dune.

If John at times micht tak' a dram
To keep fu' saft this human clay,
He settled ony inward qualm
By just "a tastin'"—he wad say,
"What ser's an' honest, social drap,
It helps to keep the denner doon"—
Then took the lapstane on his lap,
An' yerkit aff a pair o' shoon.

JOHN CROSBIE'S SHOON

John Crosbie's shoon, John Crosbie's shoon, A wealth was in John Crosbie's shoon; For wear them late or wear them sune, They never, never wad gang dune.

They say that aince—it's a' a lee,
An' yet sic things get easy oot—
When John had something in his ee
He sewed twa soles upon ae boot.
What though he did, then nocht was wrang
The pair o' soles were firm an' soun',
An' fit wi' onywhere to gang,
For nae sma' drink was Crosbie's shoon.

John Crosbie's shoon, John Crosbie's shoon, A wealth was in John Crosbie's shoon; For wear them late or wear them sune, They never, never wad gang dune.

John tak's his rest noo free frae a'
Within the kirkyaird on the hill,
But though for years he's been awa'
The hamely proverb lingers still.
When fowk bring hame—say some gudewife—
A dizzen bargains frae the toon,
The neebors say, "They'll last your life,
Like gude auld Johnnie Crosbie's shoon."

John Crosbie's shoon, John Crosbie's shoon, A wealth was in John Crosbie's shoon; For wear them late or wear them sune, They never, never wad gang dune.

A NIGHT VISION IN THE COLOSSEUM AT ROME.

I SIT upon a shattered shaft, as if Time, worn and blind, Had smote himself in sudden rage and left one limb behind.

And lo the morn comes slowly up with sweet and saintly pace,

While all the crowding stars draw near to gaze upon her face.

O solemn moon, O sad sweet stars, thus looked ye in that time

When the dim years were red with blood, and drunk with lust and crime.

Come, let their spirit touch my brow, and let their spells be cast,

And fold me in their ghostly arms, and lay me in the past.

Ho! let there be a holiday that we may see once more The wild arena thick with dust we soon shall lay with gore.

What! shall a Roman suckle not his iron strength that makes

His shield-fenced phalanx like the rock on which the ocean breaks?

Yea! by the gods, let all our veins leap with that blood anew,

Which from the she-wolf's dugs the twins in their wild hunger drew.

Hark! as a long deep sudden peal of thunder rolls along,

So through the corridors a hundred thousand footsteps throng.

A NIGHT VISION

Here proud imperial Titus sweeps for one swift hour a god,

And all the mightiest of Rome impatient wait his nod. The bolts are drawn, and forth at once a hundred lions spring,

That, like a tawny whirlwind, sweep in rage around the ring.

Their naked fangs drip blood but still amid their savage play,

The Romans whisper each; "what gladiators fight to-day?"

Clear the arena! we must see the muscles stretch and start,

Or heave in death; a life is naught if sculptors learn their art.

And forth each gladiator steps a proud look in his eye, For well they know that Rome to-day looks on to see them die.

They fight. One falls, and falling, turns to make his last appeal,

In vain, there thunders forth the cry, "Thou slave receive the steel."

The victor strikes, the victim sinks — my God! what faith can come

To wrench this blood-thirst from the heart and strike the tiger dumb.

Lo, as an earthquake rends the hills that hem an inland lake,

And downward through each yawning gulf the black waves foam and shake,

So sinks the human tide, while Time, still faithful to his trust,

Rains through the years that muffle him a silent storm of dust.

A NIGHT VISION

- Till, as a rainbow bends itself, so through the wasting night
- There bursts, inwoven with keen stars, a bow of living light;
- And underneath, the Cross on which with brow all dim and torn,
- The Christ of sorrow, toil and pain, and of the crown of thorn,
- At whom the gods of Rome fall down and shiver as they lie,
- Or lift in white despair their shattered hands against the sky.
- And from those grand eyes dark with love, a glorious light is shed,
- The far-off nations feel its beams and bow in awe their head.
- And now—as when a slave, set free from the corroding load
- Of chains, springs up and in that love stands with his face to God—
- "Behold our God!" they cry, and all the eager heavens above
- Send on from spinning sun to sun the victor-shout of love;
- For lo, the light that crowns the Cross shoots through the starry scope,
- And rears against the rising years a golden arch of hope,
- Through which, as when some mighty host looms upwards huge and dim,
- March the great destinies to shape this God-made world and him.