

A POET'S BID FOR FAME.

JOHNNY RHYMER was a carpet-weaver to trade, and a poet by nature. He spun rhymes as easily as he spun cloth; but the latter commodity was more in request than the former, otherwise Johnny might have made a fortune out of his "poetry."

At last, however, a wag suggested to Johnny the propriety of selecting higher themes, and going in for a volume—and fame!

Univ Calif - Digitized by Microsoft®

A volume and fame! How Johnny, simple, confiding man, caught at these talismanic words.

The idea of a book of his poems was for long a sweet and well-kept secret. At last, however, he grew so full of the ethereal subject that he was forced, under an overpowering sense of ecstasy, to confidentially communicate the momentous project to his wife.

"Mattie," he said, one night, as the pair sat before the fire, "Mattie, I'm gaun to communicate a great secret to ye."

"Ay, Johnny; an' what's that?"

"But ye maunna blab it, mind ye—maunna whisper even the wee'st word o't, d'ye hear?"

"It's hard for me when I dinna ken it yet; what's your secret, Johnny?"

"It's this—I'm gaun to publish a volume o' poems—a volume o' *my* poems, mind ye."

"Awa' to yer bed, Johnny; ye've been owre lang up the nicht," was Mattie's crushing answer.

"Ay, oh ay; that's a' the encouragement I get frae you. I'm to keep my poetic licht hid under a bushel, an' jist leeve an' dee a common carpet-weaver."

"An' what else are ye, I'd like to ken? Naething else but a plain-gaun carpet-weaver, the mair's the pity."

"I'm a poet, Mattie, an' the world will hear o't before the year's oot," was Johnny's self-conscious answer.

"If you've ony spare time on hand, Johnny, dinna, for pity's sake, spend it on poetry. There's the grate to black-lead for yae thing, an' a hundred mair things to help me wi', apairt frae rockin' the cradle on the washin'-days."

"But there's money in the project, Mattie—there's money as weel as fame in't."

"Money in't, is there? Oh, in that case ye'd best proceed. Noo, when I reflect on't, there's naething I'm fonder o' than jist a bit hamely clinkin' Scotch verse."

"Ay, Mattie; but it's something lofty I maun try for the

public—something higher, more elevated, and with some aspiring soul in it—higher! higher! higher!” and Johnny, wrapt in his theme, pointed from floor to dresser, and from dresser to shelf, until his rising imagination was summarily checked in its upward flight by the unpoetic ceiling.

“Is’t an attic ye’re intendin’ to flit to, Johnny?” asked Mattie, in perfect sincerity.

“An attic!” sneered Johnny; “woman, ye’re no fit to be the wife o’ a poet. Ay, it’s an attic; but it’s an attic of the soul, Mattie, an attic of the soul!”

“Preserve us!” ejaculated the guileless Mattie, who knew as much about soul attics as she did about arithmetic, which was exactly nothing at all. “Weel, Johnny, if there’s money in yer ploy, as ye say there is, the sooner ye’re intae’t, heid an’ feet, the better. Wee Johnny’s sair wantin’ a new pair o’ shune, an’ I mysel’ am jist on the parish for a new bonnet.”

“Dinna ye be speakin’ o’t, Mattie, but if my poems are published, ye’ll no only get a new bonnet, but I’ll promise ye a grand new ostrich feather for’t, as lang’s yer airm.”

The pleased smile which a moment after illuminated Mattie’s homely countenance broadened so ineffably as to almost put the ends of her rather large mouth into contact with the tips of her two ears, and the plot of publishing Johnny’s “poems” was thereupon mutually agreed to as the right and proper thing to do.

So, after a mature consideration of about three minutes duration, Johnny sat down and concocted a grand “prospectus,” in the following “drawing” terms:—

In the Press, and will be shortly Published

Price (to Subscribers) 2s. 6d.,

THREADS FROM THE SHUTTLE OF SONG,

BY JOHNNY RHYMER.

In submitting his prospectus the author desires to state that he has been very warmly encouraged to do so by

Univ Calif - Digitized by Microsoft®

numerous friends and admirers of his works in verse. The volume will contain fifty-seven pieces in all, including the author's three popular topical songs:—

“Maggie, is your Mother out?”

“Don't Lift a Dog by the Tail.”

“Give Me a Chance to do Well.”

The author was in high hopes of making up the collection to sixty pieces, but his laudable intention was twice frustrated, his youngest child having one week succumbed to the measles, while the following Friday happened to be “washing-day,” which once more upset his sweet incantations with the Nine delightful Muses.

Although flattered by the warm praises of perhaps too partial friends, the author has not, he sincerely hopes, allowed his native modesty to be altogether eclipsed. He recognises himself, poetically of course, as a small fly on one of the wheels of the great Chariot of Poetry, as drawn through space by the glorious steeds of the sun! He hopes, however, to one day have an honoured seat on the “dicky,” and to jerk a god-like rein.

Intending subscribers should send in their names and addresses without delay (as the edition is limited) to the author,

JOHNNY RHYMER,
963 Poetical Place
(Off Poverty Square),
GLASGOW.

Right-hand Door (3rd in the Lobby),
(7 Stairs Up).

GOD SAVE THE QUEEN!

“That'll draw subscribers, Mattie, just like a fair mustard poultice,” said Johnny, the moment he had completed the composition of it, the sweat hailing down his rubicund nose in crystal beads.

“I hope sae,” was Mattie's cautious response, “for I'm in sair need o' a new bonnet.”

“Dinna talk about bonnets the noo, Mattie; cultivate, for at least six weeks to come, a soul above ribbons an' sic

falderals," was Johnny's rather cutting retort, as he rammed on his hat and hurried like lichtnin' to the printer's, with the prospectus of his poems in his breeks' pocket.

Next day Johnny was gratified in seeing his "prospectus" in all the glory of print, and he handed copies about to his friends and acquaintances with a self-complacent smile which was truly delightful to behold. Johnny Rhymer, it seemed, was already on the high road to fame—was, in fact, off the mere wheel, and was now sitting on "the dicky" of the great Chariot of Poetry.

"What's the meaning of GOD SAVE THE QUEEN at the end of your prospectus?" very gravely asked a Radical friend of Johnny's; "is it a bid for a pension, or what?"

"No, no, no! It's loyalty! loyalty! loyalty!" proudly answered Johnny.

"And you a Radical, Johnny?"

"True friend; but remember I am also a poet!—a poet! and being a poet, my soul is broad enough to take in all sects and schisms. I am a liberal-minded Radical, and my soul is as wide in its sweep as the circling heavens!" and making his hand fly round at arm's length, expressive of his words, he accidentally struck off the hat of his friend, who quickly concluded that poetry had "tooken" Johnny's brain; that he was not quite responsible for his actions; and that he very probably meant murder against all such as refused to subscribe for his poems. So picking up his hat in a hurry, he cried aloud:—

"Put down my name for a copy of your blooming book of poetry, and let me off safe!" And in ten seconds the excited subscriber had put such distance between himself and the gifted son of the Muses as his bodily safety seemed to require.

Indeed, the job of canvassing subscribers' names was a very disheartening one to Johnny, whose spirit was as far above servility as his poetic soul was above potatoes. One

rascally person told him that he had no desire to encourage self-imposed lunacy, and invited him, if he was a poet worth his salt, to find a rhyme for the word "orange," a feat which Johnny distinctly failed to accomplish. Another man, at whose house he called, set the dog on him; while a third callous ruffian threatened to hand him over to the authorities, under warrant of the Police-Bill clause affecting the disposal of beggars. Moreover, a professional phrenologist on whom he waited, wanted to "read" his head "as a curiosity;" a local barber threatened to "shave him;" while a rival poet whom he accidentally met, and who was also "on the cadge" with *his* prospectus, fought him with his two fists on the question of priority of canvass, and left Johnny lying on the ground figuratively bleeding at every pore, and seeing six ways at once. In fact, what Johnny Rhymer endured on account of his aspiring bid for poetic fame, the gross material world shall never, never, never know! Johnny, in just revenge, wrote an epigram on the business, which was as follows:—

FAME.

Say, what is Fame?—a treacle stick;
 The poet, he aspires to suck it;
 It spins and fades—a showman's trick—
 And he is left to kick-the-bucket!
 In other words, the Summer skies,
 That lured him on, resolve to Winter;
 The hope recedes! the vision dies!
 And he is left to fecht the printer!

Having thus emptied his charged soul, Johnny concluded to canvass names no more, but to depend on the merits of his book, and a public advertisement.

Thus, when the book was really ready for sale, Johnny took his wife into extreme confidence on the subject, and inserted a drawing advertisement in a local weekly newspaper.

He was a poet, of course, and being a poet was very sanguine of success, so he naturally expected a rush of letters

for copies of his book. Thus, he hopefully invested sixpence in two quires of white wrapping paper, 2½d. in a small ball of coloured string, a penny in a bottle of gum "warranted to stick," and about five shillings in postage stamps,—all for the sending out of his books.

The advertisement duly appeared, and at the kirk on the following Sunday Johnny could not fix his mind on the minister's sermon for two consecutive minutes for thinking of the shoal of letters expected by the Monday morning post. In fact, he didn't go out that morning to his work, so as to be ready for the arrival of the 8 o'clock post, and between 8 and 9 o'clock he asked his wife, Mattie, a hundred times, "if the postman wasna to be seen in the street yet?"

Ah, yes! there was that anxiously-waited-for postman at last! He came down the street, crossed over to Johnny's side, and—passed on to the close below!

"It's a mistake!" gasped out Johnny; "that postman's no' a' there! he's overlooked my bag o' letters; I'll see him about it," and he was making for the door, when an idea struck him, with the force of a brick, that perhaps the replies to the "advertisement" were so numerous, and the bundle of letters so very huge, that a special man would shortly arrive at the house with the whole bagful on his aching back, or a postal van, perhaps, painted red, and with V.R. inscribed on each side of it, would consign its bulky contents at his door, 963 Poetical Place, Poverty Square.

Full of this pleasing delusion, Johnny waited at home till ten minutes before ten o'clock, but no bagful of letters arrived, and with a rather vague sense of defeat at his heart, he returned to work responsive to the imperative call of the factory bell.

All that day he was busy inventing excuses for the non-appearance of the expected letters. It was too soon to look for replies, as the public hadn't yet had time to write. When he returned home at night there would, of course, be

quite a pile of letters waiting him, and he would be gloriously busy all night wrapping up books for the post.

At six o'clock Johnny returned home, and his first words to Mattie were—

“Is there ony letters?”

“Yes,” said Mattie.

“Hooray! hoo mony?”

“Yin!”

“Great Jupiter!” gasped out Johnny, as he extended his hand for the solitary reply to his newspaper advertisement.

He opened it, and found, to his sheer disgust and disappointment, that the writer was also a poet, who, having seen his address, took the liberty of asking him to subscribe for *his* volume, to help him to pay the printer, as he had lost £10 by the venture, hoping that he (the advertiser) would be more successful.

Johnny flung the letter into the fire, and drew a sigh three feet in length.

For the three succeeding days he received letters from various quarters on quite a variety of topics, but no subscriptions for his volume. He had letters from German lottery-dealers, cards from local jobbing printers, and requests from country poets to furnish them with details of the cost of publishing a book of poems, with directions as to the best method of procedure. All these Johnny deliberately tossed into the fire, without the slightest feeling of compunction, poetical or otherwise. He was hunting up for a solitary subscriber to his book, but hadn't yet found one.

At last, to bring matters to a crisis, the printer's account arrived—a truly formidable document, which gave Johnny a combined dose of the toothache and the “shakers.”

However, light was at last born out of the darkness which surrounded him. A letter by-and-by did come!—a letter of the right sort, too, which was a veritable prophecy of golden fortune to him.

The heaven-sent epistle ran thus:—

“Priory Gardens, Gorse-Town.

“MY DEAR, BELOVED BARD,—I notice with unfeigned pleasure the advertisement relative to your book of poems. Modestly, yet with a feeling of just pride, you state yourself to be the author of that most charming of modern song-gems, which I have never read, ‘Give Me a Chance to do Well.’ I will give you a chance, my dear, delightful brother bard. Put me down for fifty copies of your book of poems, at £1 each! Please deliver them here in person, at your very earliest convenience, and, believe me, your sincere admirer,

“FRED FANCIFUL.

“To Johnny Rhymer, Poet.”

“Hooray! hooray!! hooray!!!” shouted Johnny, when he had read the flattering and highly generous epistle. “Mattie, my fortune’s made! I’ve found a generous patron at last! Hooray!”

“Then my new bonnet’s a’ richt, Johnny, I suppose?”

“Cor, woman, can ye no haud yer clackin’ tongue about bonnets till a body gets richt haud o’ a spoke o’ the whirlin’ wheel o’ fortune! I’m fair sick o’ baith you an’ your new bonnets. Cultivate poetry, woman; there’s something grand an’ soul-ennoblin’ in the very name o’t! Weather wet or dry, I tak’ the road for Gorse-Town the morn’s mornin’.”

And Johnny did take the road by eight o’clock next morning, with a sweet bundle of fifty copies of his Poems on his back—a happy sort of poetical Pilgrim’s Progress setting out from the City of Neglect, his eyes and his hopes set on the fair Gardens of Patronage, to which the beneficent voice of a golden Promise had generously invited him.

Gorse-Town was eight miles distant from Glasgow, and within two hours he had sighted Priory Gardens, and was presently within the wicket-gate opening on the lawn.

A venerable-looking old gentleman, with long, flowing, white hair, and a smiling expression of countenance, was complacently sunning himself in a green arbour, which

overlooked a sloping garden of flowers. In the distance, the stone porticoes of a noble old country manor-house were seen through the intervening trees.

"Meet residence for a patron of the poets!" muttered Johnny to himself, as he stepped towards the venerable-looking old gentleman in the arbour, whom he rightly concluded to be the proprietor and good genius of the place, who had so generously invited him there.

"Mr. Frederick Fanciful, I presume," deferentially said Johnny, dropping his bundle of books on the gravel walk.

"That's me," said the venerable-looking old gentleman, smiling with a most angelic sweetness of expression. "Pray, sir, whom have I the pleasure of addressing?"

"I'm Johnny Rhymer, the—the—the poet, sir," stammered out Johnny.

"Abraham—Isaac—and—Jacob!" exclaimed the enraptured patron, "do my privileged eyes indeed behold a poet! Oh, this is a proud moment of my existence!—a red-letter field-day in the diary of my life! Come to my arms, my bard! my brother!" and before Johnny could wink twice, he was literally in the fond arms of his generous patron, and all but suffocated with pressure and snuff!

"Achee! achay! ahhh!" sneezed Johnny, when relieved from his patron's choking embrace. Then, he first wiped the water from his weeping eyes, and afterwards ventured to make an allusion to the kind order for the fifty copies of his book of poems so generously given him.

"Oh, yes, of course, of course," answered the good, kind old gentleman, "I will be delighted to patronise and reward you; but, alas! here comes my evil genius. I must get me gone. Adieu for the present; may we meet above!" and kissing his jewelled hand to Johnny, the venerable-looking old gentleman bowed himself most amiably off.

In two seconds a big, strong, rough-looking fellow confronted Johnny.

“What do you want here, fellow?” he gruffly demanded.

Johnny, in faltering accents, detailed the nature and purpose of his visit.

“Great sticks! are you another poet?” said the fellow, with a shout of laughter; “there have been fourteen poets here this week already! Are you not aware the old gov'nor (directing his finger at the retiring figure of the good genius of the gardens)—are you not aware, I ask, that the old gov'nor is touched? (tapping his brow with his forefinger). It's his weakness to write to poets offering them sums of money, averaging from £5 to £500 for so many copies of their works. This is your lot of books, I presume? [Johnny nodded.] Well, pick it up and begone!”

“But the books were ordered; I have the old gentleman's letter, and I claim damages—expenses,” put in Johnny, his whole poetic soul rising into his mouth; “yes, I claim substantial damages!”

“You claim damages, you do? Then you shall have them,” said the rough-looking keeper, and catching up Johnny he at once chucked him bodily over the hedge into the roadway.

Johnny lighted on his physical “fours,” and had just succeeded in scrambling to his two ordinary feet, when he was once more struck to the earth by his bundle of books which the unceremonious keeper had thrown after their excommunicated author.

Such was the end of Johnny Rhymer's dream of fame. Crest-fallen and broken-hearted, he trudged back to the city as dead in spirits as a door-nail. He has since abandoned poetry as a fraud, and now sticks to carpet-weaving.

Mattie, poor woman, is aye wearing her auld bonnet yet; the printer's account is still unpaid; while Johnny remains a fixed resident in Poverty Square.