

AULD REEKIE.

[AULD REEKIE!](#)¹ wale o' ilka town
That Scotland kens beneath the moon;
Where couthy chieles at e'enin' meet,
Their bizzin' craigs and mo us to weet;
And blythely gar auld care gae by
Wi' blinkit and wi' bleerin' eye.
Ower lang frae thee the muse has been
Sae frisky on the simmer's green,
When flowers and gowans went to glent
In bonnie blinks upon the bent;
But now the leaves o' yellow dye,
Peel'd frae the branches, quickly fly;
And now frae nouter bush nor brier
The speckled mavis greets your ear;

Nor bonnie blackbird skims and roves
To seek his love in yonder groves.

¹ This poem, forming a curious memorial of Edinburgh in its old state, was evidently originally intended to be of considerable length. Down to the lines—

“While our new city spreads around
Her bonny wings on fairy ground,”—

it was published in a small tract in 1773, as “Canto I.,” with the modest dedication:—”To Sir William Forbes, Baronet, this Poem is most respectfully dedicated, by his most obedient and very humble servant, the Author.” Dr. David Irving tells (though without stating his authority) that Sir William despised

“The poor ovations of a minstrel's praise,”

and that the result was, that, unencouraged, the design was left uncompleted. The few additions and corrections first appeared in Ruddiman's supplement to Part I. of the Poems, 1779.

As to the origin of the familiar and not inappropriate appellation of “Auld Reekie” for Edinburgh, which is as old at least as the reign of Charles II., history and tradition alike are dumb. Of course, we have all heard the story of the old gentleman in Fife who regulated the time of his evening worship in summer by the appearance of the thickening smoke over the city in the late twilight, and who would call in the family, saying, “It's time noo, bairns, te tak' the beuks an' gang to our beds, for yonder's Auld Reekie, I see, putting on her nicht-cap;” but we hesitate to believe that the *soubriquet* was employed there for the first time: hesitate no less, either, although convinced that it was the prevailing smoke that suggested the word “Reekie.”

Then, Reekie, welcome! Thou canst charm,
Unfleggit by the year's alarm.
Not Boreas, that sae snelly blows,
Dare here pap in his angry nose;
Thanks to our dads, whase biggin' stands
A shelter to surrounding lands!

Now morn, wi' bonnie purpie-smiles
Kisses the air-cock o' St. Giles;
Rakin' their een, the servant lasses
Early begin their lies and clashes.
Ilk tells her friend o' saddest distress,
That still she bruiks frae scoulin' mistress;
And wi' her joe, in turnpike stair,
She'd rather snuff the stinkin' air,
As be subjected to her tongue,
When justly censured in the wrong.

On stair, wi' tub or pat in hand,
The barefoot housemaids lo'e to stand,
That antrin fouk may ken how snell
Auld Reekie will at mornin' smell:
Then, wi' an inundation big as
The burn that 'neath the Nor' Loch brig is,
They kindly shower Edina's roses,
To quicken and regale our noses.
Now some for this, wi' satire's leesh,
Hae gien auld Edinburgh a creesh:
But without sourin' nought is sweet;
The mornin' smells that hail our street
Prepare and gently lead the way
To simmer canty, braw, and gay.
Edina's sons mair eithly share
Her spices and her dainties rare,
Than he that's never yet been call'd
Aft frae his plaidie or his fauld.

Now stairhead critics, senseless fools,
Censure their aim, and pride their rules,
In Luckenbooths, wi' glowrin' eye,
Their neibour's sma'est faults descry.
If ony loun should dander there,
O' awkward gait and foreign air,
They trace his steps, till they can tell
His pedigree as weel's himsel'.

When Phoebus blinks wi' warmer ray,
And schools at noon-day get the play,
Then bus'ness, weighty bus'ness, comes;
The trader glowers—he doubts, he hums.

The lawyers eke to Cross repair,
Their wigs to shaw, and toss an air;
While busy agent closely plies,
And a' his kittle cases tries.

Now night, that's cunzied chief for fun,
Is wi' her usual rites begun:
Through ilka gate the torches blaze,
And globes send out their blinkin' rays.
The usefu' cadie plies in street,
To bide the profits o' his feet;
For, by thir lads Auld Eeekie's fouk
Ken but a sample o' the stock
O' thieves, that nightly wad oppress,
And mak baith goods and gear the less.
Near him the lazy chairman stands,
And wats na how to turn his hands,
Till some daft birkie, rantin' fou,
Has matters somewhere else to do;—
The chairman willing gies his light
To deeds o' darkness and o' night.

It's never saxpence for a lift
That gars thir lads wi' fu'ness rift;
For they wi' better gear are paid,
And whores and culls support their trade.

Near some lamp-post, wi' dowie face,
Wi' heavy een and sour grimace,
Stands she, that beauty lang had kenn'd,
Whoredom her trade, and vice her end.
But see where now she wins her bread
By that which nature ne'er decreed,
And sings sad music to the lugs,
'Mang bourachs o' damn'd whores and rogues.
Whene'er we reputation lose,
Pair chastity's transparent gloss!
Redemption seenil kens the name,
But a's black misery and shame.

Frae joyous tavern, reelin' drunk,
Wi' fiery phiz, and een half sunk,
Behold the bruiser, fae to a'
That in the reek o' gardies fa'!
Close by his side, a feckless race
O' macaronies shew their face,
And think they're free frae skaith, or harm,
While pith befriends their leader's arm.
Yet fearfu' aften o' their maught,
They quat the glory o' the faught

To this same warrior wha led
Thae heroes to bright honour's bed;
And aft the hack o' honour shines
In bruiser's face wi' broken lines.
O' them sad tales he tells anon,
When ramble and when fighting's done;
And, like Hectorian, ne'er impairs
The brag and glory o' his sairs.

When feet in dirty gutters splash,
And fouk to wale their fitstaps fash;
At night, the macaroni drunk,
In pools or gutters afitimes sunk:
Heh! what a fright he now appears,
When he his corpse dejected rears!
Look at that head, and think if there
The pomet slaister'd up his hair!
The cheeks observe, where now could shine
The scancin' glories o' carmine?
Ah, legs! in vain the silk-worm there
Display'd to view her eident care;
For stink instead of perfumes grow,
And clarty odours fragrant flow.

Now, some to porter, some to punch,
Some to their wife, and some their wench,
Retire, while noisy ten hours' drum
Gars a' your trades gae danderin' hame.

Now, mony a club, jocose and free,
Gie a' to merriment and glee;
Wi' sang and glass they fley the power
O' care, that wad harass the hour;
For wine and Bacchus still bear down
Our thrawart fortune's wildest frown:
It maks you stark, and bauld, and brave,
Even when descending to the grave.

Now some, in Pandemonium's shade,²
Resume their gormandising trade;
Where eager looks, and glancin' een,
Forspeak a heart and stamack keen.

² Pandemonium and the Cape were two social clubs. All the shops in the town were then shut at eight o'clock; and from that hour till ten (*vide Traditions of Edinburgh*), when the drum of the Town-guard announced at once a sort of licence for the deluging of the street with nuisances, and a warning of the inhabitants home to their beds—unrestrained scope was given to the delights of the table. No tradesman thought of going home to his family till after he had spent an hour or two at his club. This was universal and unailing.

Gang on, my lads! it's lang sinsyne
We kenn'd auld Epicurus' line;
Save you, the board wad cease to rise,
Bedight wi' daintiths to the skies;
And salamanders cease to swill
The comforts o' a burning gill.

But chief, oh Cape!² we crave thy aid,
To get our cares and poortith laid.
Sincerity and genius true,
O' knights have ever been the due.
Mirth, music, porter deepest dyed,
Are never here to worth denied;
And health, o' happiness the queen,
Blinks bonny wi' her smile serene.

Though joy maist part Auld Reekie owns
Eftsoons she kens sad sorrow's frowns.
What group is yon sae dismal, grim,
Wi' horrid aspect, cleedin' dim?
Says Death, "They're mine, a dowie crew,
To me they'll quickly pay their last adieu."

How come mankind, when lacking woe,
In saulie's face their hearts to show;
As it' they were a clock to tell
That grief in them had rung her bell?
Then, what is man?—why a' this fraise?
Life's spunk decay'd, nae mair can blaze.
Let sober grief alane declare
Our fond anxiety and care;
Nor let the undertakers be
The only waefu' friends we see.

Come on, my Muse, and then rehearse
The gloomiest theme in a' your verse.
In morning, when ane keeks about,
Fu' blythe and free frae ail, nae doubt,
He lippens no to be misled
Amang the regions o' the dead;
But straight a painted corp he sees,
Lang streekit 'neath its canopies.
Soon, soon will this his mirth control,
And send damnation to his soul:
Or when the dead-deal (awfu' shape!)
Make frighted mankind girn and gape,
Reflection then his reason sours,
For the neist dead-deal may be ours.
When Sybil led the Trojan down
To haggard Pluto's dreary town,

Shapes waur nor thae, I freely ween,
Could never meet the soldier's een.

If kail sae green, or herbs, delight,
Edina's street attracts the sight:³
Not Co vent-garden, clad sae braw,
Mair fouth o' herbs can eithly shaw;
For mony a yard is here sair sought,
That kail and cabbage may be bought,
And healthfu' salad to regale,
When pamper'd wi' a heavy meal.

Glowr up the street in simmer morn,
The birks sae green, and sweet-brier thorn.
Wi' spraingit flowers that scent the gale,
Ca' far awa' the mornin' smell,
Wi' which our ladies' flower-pat's fill'd,
And every noxious vapour kill'd.
Oh, Nature! canty, blythe, and free,
Where is the keeking-glass like thee?
Is there on earth that can compare
Wi' Mary's shape, and Mary's air,
Save the empurpled speck, that grows
In the saft faulds o' yonder rose?
How bonny seems the virgin breast,
When by the lilies here carest,
And leaves the mind in doubt to tell,
Which maist in sweets and hue excel.

Gillespie's snuff⁴ should prime the nose
O' her that to the market goes,
If she wad like to shun the smells
That float around frae market cells;
Where wames o' painches' sav'ry scent
To nostrils gie great discontent.
Now wha in Albion could expect
O' cleanliness sic great neglect?
Nae Hottentot that daily lairs
'Mang tripe, and ither clarty wares,
Hath ever yet conceived or seen,
Beyond the Line, sic scenes unclean.

On Sunday here, an alter'd scene
O' men and manners meets our een.

³ The High Street between the Tron Church and St. Giles was then a vegetable market.

⁴ Two brothers Gillespie, who realised a large fortune as tobacconists in Edinburgh. Their portraits are given in Kay, where interesting memorabilia concerning them will also be found.

Ane wad maist trow some people chose
To change their faces wi' their clo'es,
And fain wad gar ilk neighbour think
They thirst for goodness as for drink;
But there's an unco dearth o' grace,
That has nae mansion but the face,

And never can obtain a part
In benmost corner o' the heart.
Why should religion mak us sad,
If good frae virtue'e to be had?
Na, rather gleefu' turn your face,
Forsake hypocrisy, grimace;
And never have it understood
You fleg mankind frae being good.

In afternoon, a' brawly buskit.
The joes and lasses loe to frisk it.
Some tak a great delight to place
The modest bon-grace owre the face;
Though you may see, if so inclined,
The turning o' the leg behind.
Now Comely-garden and the Park
Refresh them, after forenoon's wark:
Newhaven, Leith, or Canonmills,
Supply them in their Sunday's gills;
Where writers aften spend their pence,
To stock their heads wi' drink and sense.

While danderin' cits delight to stray
To Castlehill or public way,
Where they nae other purpose mean,
Than that fool cause o' being seen,
Let me to Arthur's Seat pursue,
Where bonnie pastures meet the view,
And mony a wild-lorn scene accrues,
Befitting Willie Shakspeare's muse.
If fancy there would join the thrang,
The desert rocks and hills amang,
To echoes we should lilt and play,
And gie to mirth the lee-lang day.

Or should some canker'd biting shower
The day and a' her sweets deflower,
To Holyrood-house let me stray,
And gie to musing a' the day;
Lamenting what auld Scotland knew,
Bien days for ever frae her view.
O Hamilton, for shame! the Muse
Would pay to thee her outhy vows,

Gin ye wad tent the humble strain,
And gie's our dignity again:
For, oh, wae's me! the thistle springs
In domicile o' ancient kings,
Without a patriot to regret
Our palace and our ancient state.

Blest place! where debtors daily run,
To rid themsels frae jail and dun.⁵
Here, though sequester'd frae the din
That rings Auld Reekie's wa's within;
Yet they may tread the sunny braes,
And bruik Apollo's cheery rays;
Glowr frae St. Anthon's grassy height,
Ower vales in simmer claes bedight;
Nor ewer hing their head, I ween,
Wi' jealous fear o' being seen.
May I, whenever duns come nigh,
And shake my garret wi' their cry,
Scour here wi' haste, protection get,
To screen mysel' frae them and debt;
To breathe the bliss o' open sky,
And Simon Fraser's bolts defy.⁶

Now gin a loun should hae his claes
In threadbare autumn o' their days,
St. Mary, broker's guardian saunt,
Will satisfy ilk ail and want;⁷
For mony a hungry writer there
Dives down at night, wi' cleedin' bare,
And quickly rises to the view
A gentleman, perfite and new.
Ye rich fouk, look na wi' disdain
Upon this ancient brokage lane,
For naked poets are supplied
Wi' what you to their wants denied.

⁵ The precincts of Holyrood Palace were in those days a sanctuary for debtors, who were jestingly called Abbey-lairds.

⁶ The keeper of the Tolbooth.

⁷ St. Mary's Wynd—a mean street in Edinburgh, exclusively occupied by dealers in old clothes.

Peace to thy shade, thou wale o' men,
Drumuiond!⁸ relief to poortith's pain:
To thee the greatest bliss we owe,
And tribute's tear shall gratefu' flow;
The sick are cured, the hungry fed,
And dreams o' comfort tend their bed.
As lang as Forth weets Lothian's shore,
As lang's on Fife her billows roar,
Sae lang shall ilk whase country's dear,
To thy remembrance gie a tear.
By thee, Auld Reekie thrave and grew
Delightfu' to her childer's view;
Nae mair shall Glasgow striplings threap
Their city's beauty and its shape,
While our new city spreads around
Her bonny wings on fairy ground.⁹

But provosts now, that ne'er afford
The sma'est dignity to lord,
Ne'er care though every scheme gae wild
That Drummond's sacred hand has cull'd.
The spacious brig¹⁰ neglected lies,
Though plagued wi' pamphlets, dunn'd wi' cries;
They heed not, though destruction come
To gulp us in her gaunting womb.
Oh, shame! that safety canna claim
Protection from a provost's name;
But hidden danger lies behind,
To torture and to fleg the mind.
I may as weel bid Arthur's Seat
To Berwick Law mak gleg retreat,
As think that either will or art
Shall get the gate to win their heart:
For politics are a' their mark,

Bribes latent, and corruption dark.
If they can eithly turn the pence,
Wi' city's good they will dispense,
Nor care though a' her sons were lair'd
Ten fathom i' the auld kirkyard.

⁸ George Drummond, a benevolent chief magistrate of Edinburgh, who was chiefly instrumental in the establishment of an infirmary in his native city, and in the extension of the city over the grounds to the north.

⁹ Here the poem as Canto I. ended.

¹⁰ In allusion to the state of the North Bridge after its fall.

To sing yet meikle does remain,
Undepent for a modest strain;
And since the poet's daily bread is
The favour o' the Muse or ladies,
He downa like to gie offence
To delicacy's tender sense;
Therefore the stews remain unsung,
And bawds in silence drop their tongue.

Reekie, fareweel! I ne'er could part
Wi' thee, but wi' a dowie heart:
Aft frae the Fifan coast I've seen
Thee towerin' on thy summit green;
So glowr the saints when first is given
A favourite keek o' glorie and heaven.
On earth nae mair they bend their een,
But quick assume angelic mien;
So I on Fife wad glowr no more,
But gallop to Edina's shore.