

The Brigs Of Ayr: Inscribed to John Ballantine, Esq., Ayr.

The simple Bard, rough at the rustic plough,
 Learning his tuneful trade from ev'ry bough;
 The chanting linnet, or the mellow thrush,
 Hailing the setting sun, sweet, in the green thorn bush;
 The soaring lark, the perching red-breast shrill,
 Or deep-ton'd plovers grey, wild-whistling o'er the hill;
 Shall he-nurst in the peasant's lowly shed,
 To hardy independence bravely bred,
 By early poverty to hardship steel'd.
 And train'd to arms in stern Misfortune's field-
 Shall he be guilty of their hireling crimes,
 The servile, mercenary Swiss of rhymes?
 Or labour hard the panegyric close,
 With all the venal soul of dedicating prose?
 No! though his artless strains he rudely sings,
 And throws his hand uncouthly o'er the strings,
 He glows with all the spirit of the Bard,
 Fame, honest fame, his great, his dear reward.
 Still, if some patron's gen'rous care he trace,
 Skill'd in the secret, to bestow with grace;
 When Ballantine befriends his humble name,
 And hands the rustic stranger up to fame,
 With heartfelt throes his grateful bosom swells,
 The godlike bliss, to give, alone excels.

'Twas when the stacks get on their winter hap,
 And thack and rape secure the toil-won crap;
 Potatoe-bings are snugged up frae skaith
 O' coming Winter's biting, frosty breath;
 The bees, rejoicing o'er their summer toils,
 Unnumber'd buds an' flow'rs' delicious spoils,
 Seal'd up with frugal care in massive waxen piles,
 Are doom'd by Man, that tyrant o'er the weak,
 The death o' devils, smoor'd wi' brimstone reek:
 The thundering guns are heard on ev'ry side,
 The wounded coveys, reeling, scatter wide;
 The feather'd field-mates, bound by Nature's tie,
 Sires, mothers, children, in one carnage lie:
 (What warm, poetic heart but inly bleeds,
 And execrates man's savage, ruthless deeds!)
 Nae mair the flow'r in field or meadow springs,
 Nae mair the grove with airy concert rings,
 Except perhaps the Robin's whistling glee,
 Proud o' the height o' some bit half-lang tree:
 The hoary morns precede the sunny days,
 Mild, calm, serene, wide spreads the noontide blaze,
 While thick the gosamour waves wanton in the rays.

'Twas in that season, when a simple Bard,
 Unknown and poor-simplicity's reward!-
 Ae night, within the ancient brugh of Ayr,
 By whim inspir'd, or haply prest wi' care,
 He left his bed, and took his wayward route,
 And down by Simpson's wheel'd the left about:
 (Whether impell'd by all-directing Fate,
 To witness what I after shall narrate;
 Or whether, rapt in meditation high,
 He wander'd out, he knew not where or why:)
 The drowsy Dungeon-clock had number'd two,
 and Wallace Tower had sworn the fact was true:
 The tide-swoln firth, with sullen-sounding roar,
 Through the still night dash'd hoarse along the shore.
 All else was hush'd as Nature's closed e'e;
 The silent moon shone high o'er tower and tree;
 The chilly frost, beneath the silver beam,

Crept, gently-crusting, o'er the glittering stream-
 When, lo! on either hand the list'ning Bard,
 The clanging sugh of whistling wings is heard;
 Two dusky forms dart through the midnight air;
 Swift as the gos drives on the wheeling hare;
 Ane on th' Auld Brig his airy shape uprears,
 The other flutters o'er the rising piers:
 Our warlock Rhymer instantly dexcried
 The Sprites that owre the Brigs of Ayr preside.
 (That Bards are second-sighted is nae joke,
 And ken the lingo of the sp'ritual folk;
 Fays, Spunkies, Kelpies, a', they can explain them,
 And even the very deils they brawly ken them).
 Auld Brig appear'd of ancient Pictish race,
 The very wrinkles Gothic in his face;
 He seem'd as he wi' Time had warstl'd lang,
 Yet, teughly doure, he bade an unco bang.

New Brig was buskit in a braw new coat,
 That he, at Lon'on, frae ane Adams got;
 In 's hand five taper staves as smooth 's a bead,
 Wi' virls and whirlygigums at the head.
 The Goth was stalking round with anxious search,
 Spying the time-worn flaws in every arch;
 It chanc'd his new-come neibor took his e'e,
 And e'en a vexed and angry heart had he!
 Wi' thieveless sneer to see his modish mien,
 He, down the water, gies him this guid-e'en:-

Auld Brig

"I doubt na, frien', ye'll think ye're nae sheepshank,
 Ance ye were streakit owre frae bank to bank!
 But gin ye be a brig as auld as me-
 Tho' faith, that date, I doubt, ye'll never see-
 There'll be, if that day come, I'll wad a boddle,
 Some fewer whigmaleeries in your noddle."

New Brig

"Auld Vandal! ye but show your little mense,
 Just much about it wi' your scanty sense:
 Will your poor, narrow foot-path of a street,
 Where twa wheel-barrows tremble when they meet,
 Your ruin'd, formless bulk o' stane and lime,
 Compare wi' bonie brigs o' modern time?
 There's men of taste wou'd tak the Ducat stream,
 Tho' they should cast the very sark and swim,
 E'er they would grate their feelings wi' the view
 O' sic an ugly, Gothic hulk as you."

Auld Brig

"Conceited gowk! puff'd up wi' windy pride!
 This mony a year I've stood the flood an' tide;
 And tho' wi' crazy eild I'm sair forfairn,
 I'll be a brig when ye're a shapeless cairn!
 As yet ye little ken about the matter,
 But twa-three winters will inform ye better.
 When heavy, dark, continued, a'-day rains,

Wi' deepening deluges o'erflow the plains;
 When from the hills where springs the brawling Coil,
 Or stately Lugar's mossy fountains boil;
 Or where the Greenock winds his moorland course.
 Or haunted Garpal draws his feeble source,
 Aroused by blustering winds an' spotting thowes,
 In mony a torrent down the snaw-broo rowes;

While crashing ice, borne on the rolling spate,
Sweeps dams, an' mills, an' brigs, a' to the gate;
And from Glenbuck, down to the Ratton-key,
Auld Ayr is just one lengthen'd, tumbling sea-
Then down ye'll hurl, (deil nor ye never rise!)
And dash the gumlie jaups up to the pouring skies!
A lesson sadly teaching, to your cost,
That Architecture's noble art is lost!"

New Brig

"Fine architecture, trowth, I needs must say't o't,
The Lord be thankit that we've tint the gate o't!
Gaunt, ghastly, ghaist-alluring edifices,
Hanging with threat'ning jut, like precipices;
O'er-arching, mouldy, gloom-inspiring coves,
Supporting roofs, fantastic, stony groves;
Windows and doors in nameless sculptures drest
With order, symmetry, or taste unblest;
Forms like some bedlam Statuary's dream,
The craz'd creations of misguided whim;
Forms might be worshipp'd on the bended knee,
And still the second dread command be free;
Their likeness is not found on earth, in air, or sea!
Mansions that would disgrace the building taste
Of any mason reptile, bird or beast:
Fit only for a doited monkish race,
Or frosty maids forsworn the dear embrace,
Or cuifs of later times, wha held the notion,
That sullen gloom was sterling, true devotion:
Fancies that our guid Brugh denies protection,
And soon may they expire, unblest wi' resurrection!"

Auld Brig

"O ye, my dear-remember'd, ancient yealings,
Were ye but here to share my wounded feelings!
Ye worthy Proveses, an' mony a Bailie,
Wha in the paths o' righteousness did toil aye;
Ye dainty Deacons, and ye douce Conveners,
To whom our moderns are but causey-cleaners
Ye godly Councils, wha hae blest this town;
ye godly Brethren o' the sacred gown,
Wha meekly gie your hurdies to the smiters;
And (what would now be strange), ye godly Writers;
A' ye douce folk I've borne aboon the broo,
Were ye but here, what would ye say or do?
How would your spirits groan in deep vexation,
To see each melancholy alteration;
And, agonising, curse the time and place
When ye begat the base degen'rate race!
Nae langer rev'rend men, their country's glory,
In plain braid Scots hold forth a plain braid story;
Nae langer thrifty citizens, an' douce,
Meet owre a pint, or in the Council-house;
But staumrel, corky-headed, graceless Gentry,
The herryment and ruin of the country;
Men, three-parts made by tailors and by barbers,
Wha waste your weel-hain'd gear on damn'd new brigs and harbours!"

New Brig

"Now haud you there! for faith ye've said enough,
And muckle mair than ye can mak to through.
As for your Priesthood, I shall say but little,
Corbies and Clergy are a shot right kittle:
But, under favour o' your langer beard,
Abuse o' Magistrates might weel be spar'd;

To liken them to your auld-warld squad,
 I must needs say, comparisons are odd.
 In Ayr, wag-wits nae mair can hae a handle
 To mouth 'a Citizen,' a term o' scandal;
 Nae mair the Council waddles down the street,
 In all the pomp of ignorant conceit;
 Men wha grew wise priggin owre hops and raisins,
 Or gather'd lib'ral views in Bonds and Seisins:
 If haply Knowledge, on a random tramp,
 Had shor'd them with a glimmer of his lamp,
 And would to Common-sense for once betray'd them,
 Plain, dull Stupidity stept kindly in to aid them."

What farther clish-ma-claver aight been said,
 What bloody wars, if Sprites had blood to shed,
 No man can tell; but, all before their sight,
 A fairy train appear'd in order bright;
 Adown the glittering stream they featly danc'd;
 Bright to the moon their various dresses glanc'd:
 They footed o'er the wat'ry glass so neat,
 The infant ice scarce bent beneath their feet:
 While arts of Minstrelsy among them rung,
 And soul-ennobling Bards heroic ditties sung.

O had M'Lauchlan, thairm-inspiring sage,
 Been there to hear this heavenly band engage,
 When thro' his dear strathspeys they bore with Highland rage;
 Or when they struck old Scotia's melting airs,
 The lover's raptured joys or bleeding cares;
 How would his Highland lug been nobler fir'd,
 And ev'n his matchless hand with finer touch inspir'd!
 No guess could tell what instrument appear'd,
 But all the soul of Music's self was heard;
 Harmonious concert rung in every part,
 While simple melody pour'd moving on the heart.
 The Genius of the Stream in front appears,
 A venerable Chief advanc'd in years;
 His hoary head with water-lilies crown'd,
 His manly leg with garter-tangle bound.
 Next came the loveliest pair in all the ring,
 Sweet female Beauty hand in hand with Spring;
 Then, crown'd with flow'ry hay, came Rural Joy,
 And Summer, with his fervid-beaming eye;

All-cheering Plenty, with her flowing horn,
 Led yellow Autumn wreath'd with nodding corn;
 Then Winter's time-bleach'd locks did hoary show,
 By Hospitality with cloudless brow:
 Next followed Courage with his martial stride,
 From where the Feal wild-woody coverts hide;
 Benevolence, with mild, benignant air,
 A female form, came from the tow'rs of Stair;
 Learning and Worth in equal measures trode,
 From simple Catrine, their long-lov'd abode:
 Last, white-rob'd Peace, crown'd with a hazel wreath,
 To rustic Agriculture did bequeath
 The broken, iron instruments of death:
 At sight of whom our Sprites forgat their kindling wrath.