

Epistle To Davie, A Brother Poet

January

While winds frae aff Ben-Lomond blaw,
 An' bar the doors wi' driving snaw,
 An' hing us owre the ingle,
 I set me down to pass the time,
 An' spin a verse or twa o' rhyme,
 In hamely, westlin jingle.
 While frosty winds blaw in the drift,
 Ben to the chimla lug,
 I grudge a wee the great-folk's gift,
 That live sae bien an' snug:
 I tent less, and want less
 Their roomy fire-side;
 But hanker, and canker,
 To see their cursed pride.

It's hardly in a body's pow'r
 To keep, at times, frae being sour,
 To see how things are shar'd;
 How best o' chiels are whiles in want,
 While coofs on countless thousands rant,
 And ken na how to wair't;
 But, Davie, lad, ne'er fash your head,
 Tho' we hae little gear;
 We're fit to win our daily bread,
 As lang's we're hale and fier:
 "Mair spier na, nor fear na,"
 Auld age ne'er mind a feg;
 The last o't, the warst o't
 Is only but to beg.

To lie in kilns and barns at e'en,
 When banes are craz'd, and bluid is thin,
 Is doubtless, great distress!

Yet then content could make us blest;
 Ev'n then, sometimes, we'd snatch a taste
 Of truest happiness.
 The honest heart that's free frae a'
 Intended fraud or guile,
 However Fortune kick the ba',
 Has aye some cause to smile;
 An' mind still, you'll find still,
 A comfort this nae sma';
 Nae mair then we'll care then,
 Nae farther can we fa'.

What tho', like commoners of air,
 We wander out, we know not where,
 But either house or hal',
 Yet nature's charms, the hills and woods,
 The sweeping vales, and foaming floods,
 Are free alike to all.
 In days when daisies deck the ground,
 And blackbirds whistle clear,
 With honest joy our hearts will bound,
 To see the coming year:
 On braes when we please, then,
 We'll sit an' sowth a tune;
 Syne rhyme till't we'll time till't,
 An' sing't when we hae done.

It's no in titles nor in rank;
 It's no in wealth like Lon'on bank,

To purchase peace and rest:
 It's no in makin' muckle, mair;
 It's no in books, it's no in lear,
 To make us truly blest:
 If happiness hae not her seat
 An' centre in the breast,
 We may be wise, or rich, or great,
 But never can be blest;
 Nae treasures, nor pleasures
 Could make us happy lang;
 The heart aye's the part aye
 That makes us right or wrang.

Think ye, that sic as you and I,
 Wha drudge an' drive thro' wet and dry,
 Wi' never-ceasing toil;
 Think ye, are we less blest than they,
 Wha scarcely tent us in their way,
 As hardly worth their while?
 Alas! how aft in haughty mood,
 God's creatures they oppress!
 Or else, neglecting a' that's guid,
 They riot in excess!
 Baith careless and fearless
 Of either heaven or hell;
 Esteeming and deeming
 It's a' an idle tale!

Then let us cheerfu' acquiesce,
 Nor make our scanty pleasures less,
 By pining at our state:
 And, even should misfortunes come,
 I, here wha sit, hae met wi' some-
 An's thankfu' for them yet.
 They gie the wit of age to youth;
 They let us ken oursel';
 They make us see the naked truth,
 The real guid and ill:
 Tho' losses an' crosses
 Be lessons right severe,
 There's wit there, ye'll get there,
 Ye'll find nae other where.

But tent me, Davie, ace o' hearts!
 (To say aught less wad wrang the cartes,
 And flatt'ry I detest)
 This life has joys for you and I;
 An' joys that riches ne'er could buy,
 An' joys the very best.
 There's a' the pleasures o' the heart,
 The lover an' the frien';
 Ye hae your Meg, your dearest part,
 And I my darling Jean!
 It warms me, it charms me,
 To mention but her name:
 It heats me, it beets me,
 An' sets me a' on flame!

O all ye Pow'rs who rule above!
 O Thou whose very self art love!
 Thou know'st my words sincere!
 The life-blood streaming thro' my heart,
 Or my more dear immortal part,
 Is not more fondly dear!
 When heart-corroding care and grief
 Deprive my soul of rest,
 Her dear idea brings relief,
 And solace to my breast.

Thou Being, All-seeing,
O hear my fervent pray'r;
Still take her, and make her
Thy most peculiar care!

All hail! ye tender feelings dear!
The smile of love, the friendly tear,
The sympathetic glow!
Long since, this world's thorny ways
Had number'd out my weary days,
Had it not been for you!
Fate still has blest me with a friend,
In ev'ry care and ill;
And oft a more endearing band-
A tie more tender still.
It lightens, it brightens
The tenebrific scene,
To meet with, and greet with
My Davie, or my Jean!

O, how that name inspires my style!
The words come skelpin, rank an' file,
Amaist before I ken!
The ready measure rins as fine,
As Phoebus an' the famous Nine
Were glowrin owre my pen.
My spaviet Pegasus will limp,
Till ance he's fairly het;
And then he'll hilch, and stilt, an' jimp,
And rin an unco fit:
But least then the beast then
Should rue this hasty ride,
I'll light now, and dight now
His sweaty, wizen'd hide.