

Epistle To The Rev. John M'math: Inclosing A Copy Of "Holy Willie's Prayer,"  
Which He Had Requested

While at the stook the shearers cow'r  
To shun the bitter blaudin' show'r,  
Or in gulravage rinnin scow'r  
To pass the time,  
To you I dedicate the hour  
In idle rhyme.

My musie, tir'd wi' mony a sonnet  
On gown, an' ban', an' douse black bonnet,  
Is grown right eerie now she's done it,  
Lest they should blame her,  
An' rouse their holy thunder on it  
An anathem her.

I own 'twas rash, an' rather hardy,  
That I, a simple, country bardie,  
Should meddle wi' a pack sae sturdy,  
Wha, if they ken me,  
Can easy, wi' a single wordie,  
Lowse hell upon me.

But I gae mad at their grimaces,  
Their sighin, cantin, grace-proud faces,  
Their three-mile prayers, an' half-mile graces,  
Their raxin conscience,  
Whase greed, revenge, an' pride disgraces  
Waur nor their nonsense.

There's Gaw'n, misca'd waur than a beast,  
Wha has mair honour in his breast  
Than mony scores as guid's the priest  
Wha sae abus'd him:  
And may a bard no crack his jest  
What way they've us'd him?

See him, the poor man's friend in need,  
The gentleman in word an' deed-  
An' shall his fame an' honour bleed  
By worthless, skellums,  
An' not a muse erect her head  
To cove the blellums?

O Pope, had I thy satire's darts  
To gie the rascals their deserts,  
I'd rip their rotten, hollow hearts,  
An' tell aloud  
Their jugglin hocus-pocus arts  
To cheat the crowd.

God knows, I'm no the thing I should be,  
Nor am I even the thing I could be,  
But twenty times I rather would be  
An atheist clean,  
Than under gospel colours hid be  
Just for a screen.

An honest man may like a glass,  
An honest man may like a lass,  
But mean revenge, an' malice fause  
He'll still disdain,  
An' then cry zeal for gospel laws,  
Like some we ken.

They take religion in their mouth;

They talk o' mercy, grace, an' truth,  
For what?-to gie their malice skouth  
On some puir wight,  
An' hunt him down, owre right and ruth,  
To ruin straight.

All hail, Religion! maid divine!  
Pardon a muse sae mean as mine,  
Who in her rough imperfect line  
Thus daurs to name thee;  
To stigmatise false friends of thine  
Can ne'er defame thee.

Tho' blotch't and foul wi' mony a stain,  
An' far unworthy of thy train,  
With trembling voice I tune my strain,  
To join with those  
Who boldly dare thy cause maintain  
In spite of foes:

In spite o' crowds, in spite o' mobs,  
In spite o' undermining jobs,  
In spite o' dark banditti stabs  
At worth an' merit,  
By scoundrels, even wi' holy robes,  
But hellish spirit.

O Ayr! my dear, my native ground,  
Within thy presbyterial bound  
A candid liberal band is found  
Of public teachers,  
As men, as Christians too, renown'd,  
An' manly preachers.

Sir, in that circle you are nam'd;  
Sir, in that circle you are fam'd;  
An' some, by whom your doctrine's blam'd  
(Which gies you honour)  
Even, sir, by them your heart's esteem'd,  
An' winning manner.

Pardon this freedom I have ta'en,  
An' if impertinent I've been,  
Impute it not, good Sir, in ane  
Whase heart ne'er wrang'd ye,  
But to his utmost would befriend  
Ought that belang'd ye.