

On Glenriddell's Fox Breaking His Chain: A Fragment

Thou, Liberty, thou art my theme;
 Not such as idle poets dream,
 Who trick thee up a heathen goddess
 That a fantastic cap and rod has;
 Such stale conceits are poor and silly;
 I paint thee out, a Highland filly,
 A sturdy, stubborn, handsome dapple,
 As sleek's a mouse, as round's an apple,
 That when thou pleasest canst do wonders;
 But when thy luckless rider blunders,
 Or if thy fancy should demur there,
 Wilt break thy neck ere thou go further.

These things premised, I sing a Fox,
 Was caught among his native rocks,
 And to a dirty kennel chained,
 How he his liberty regained.

Glenriddell! Whig without a stain,
 A Whig in principle and grain,
 Could'st thou enslave a free-born creature,
 A native denizen of Nature?
 How could'st thou, with a heart so good,
 (A better ne'er was sluiced with blood!)
 Nail a poor devil to a tree,
 That ne'er did harm to thine or thee?

The staunchest Whig Glenriddell was,
 Quite frantic in his country's cause;
 And oft was Reynard's prison passing,
 And with his brother-Whigs canvassing
 The Rights of Men, the Powers of Women,
 With all the dignity of Freemen.

Sir Reynard daily heard debates
 Of Princes', Kings', and Nations' fates,
 With many rueful, bloody stories
 Of Tyrants, Jacobites, and Tories:
 From liberty how angels fell,
 That now are galley-slaves in hell;
 How Nimrod first the trade began
 Of binding Slavery's chains on Man;
 How fell Semiramis-God damn her!
 Did first, with sacrilegious hammer,
 (All ills till then were trivial matters)
 For Man dethron'd forge hen-peck fetters;

How Xerxes, that abandoned Tory,
 Thought cutting throats was reaping glory,
 Until the stubborn Whigs of Sparta
 Taught him great Nature's Magna Charta;
 How mighty Rome her fiat hurl'd
 Resistless o'er a bowing world,
 And, kinder than they did desire,
 Polish'd mankind with sword and fire;
 With much, too tedious to relate,
 Of ancient and of modern date,
 But ending still, how Billy Pitt
 (Unlucky boy!) with wicked wit,
 Has gagg'd old Britain, drain'd her coffer,
 As butchers bind and bleed a heifer,

Thus wily Reynard by degrees,
 In kennel listening at his ease,
 Suck'd in a mighty stock of knowledge,

As much as some folks at a College;
Knew Britain's rights and constitution,
Her aggrandisement, diminution,
How fortune wrought us good from evil;
Let no man, then, despise the Devil,
As who should say, 'I never can need him,'
Since we to scoundrels owe our freedom.