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THE
COMMON-PLACE BOOK

OF

ANCIENT AND MODERN BALLAD

AND

Metrical Legendary Tales :

AN ORIGINAL SELECTION, INCLUDING MANY NEVER
BEFORE PUBLISHED.

“ Like the sweet Ballad, this amusing lay
Too long detains the lover on his way.”—*Gay*.

Preface signed

EDINBURGH:

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PREFACE.

THE Editor has long considered the attempt here made, to embody the most popular English and Scottish Ballads in one collection, patent, and accessible to every body, as a great *desideratum*.

To the lovers of poetry, no species of it is more interesting than the Ballad and Legendary Tale : we are familiar with the style from our infancy, and the rhymes of the most popular among them are dear to us as household words. Who does not recollect, with emotions of pleasure, *The Babes, or the Children, in the Wood* ? or, to speak of a still more modern production, who does not regard with sentiments of friendly affection that worthy citizen, *John Gilpin* ? Many valuable original pieces, never before published, will be found in the volume — to the authors of these the Editor has to acknowledge himself much indebted ; and of the author of *Glengonar's Wassail*, in particular, he may say, that if he had devoted much of his attention to Poetry, he would have ranked with the great Poets of our country.

Among the Scottish Ballads and Tales, many interesting pieces will be found, such as *Hardyknute*, *Gil Morrice*, &c.; and the Editor trusts, that the Collection altogether will be found not unworthy of a favourable reception from the Public.

J.

Edinburgh, 18th May 1824.

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LEONORA.

From the German of Bürger.

At break of day with frightful dreams
Leonora struggled sore ;
“ My William, art thou slain,” said she,
“ Or dost thou love no more ?”

He went abroad with Richard's host,
The Paynim foes to quell ;

But he no word to her had wrote
If he were sick or well.

With sound of trump, and beat of drum,
His fellow-soldiers come ;
Their helms bedeck'd with oaken boughs,
They seek their long'd-for home.

And every road and every lane
Was full of old and young,
To gaze at the rejoicing band,
To hail with gladsome tongue.

“ Thank God !” their wives and children said,
“ Welcome !” the brides did say ;
But greet or kiss Leonora gave
To none upon that day.

She ask'd of all the passing train
For him she wish'd to see ;
But none of all the passing train
Could tell if lived he.

And when the soldiers all were by,
She tore her raven hair,
And cast herself upon the ground,
In furious despair.

Her mother ran, and lift her up,
And clasped in her arm,
“ My child, my child, what dost thou ail ?
God shield thy life from harm !”

“ O mother, mother, William's gone !
What's all beside to me ?
There is no mercy, sure, above ;
All, all were spar'd but he.”

“ Kneel down, thy paternoster say,
’Twill calm thy troubled sp’rit :
The Lord is wise, the Lord is good ;
What he hath done is right.”

“ O mother, mother, say not so—
Most cruel is my fate ;
I pray’d, and pray’d—but what avail’d ?
’Tis now, alas ! too late.”

“ Our heavenly Father, if we pray,
Will help a suffering child ;
Go take the holy sacrament,
So shall thy grief grow mild.”

“ O mother, what I feel within
No sacrament can stay ;
No sacrament can teach the dead
To bear the sight of day.”

“ May be, among the heathen folk,
Thy William false doth prove,
And puts away his faith and troth,
And takes another love :

“ Then wherefore sorrow for his loss ?
Thy moans are all in vain :
And when his soul and body part,
His falsehood brings him pain.”

“ O mother, mother ! he is gone,
My hope is all forlorn ;
The grave my only safeguard is,—
O, had I ne’er been born !

“ Go out, go out, my lamp of life !
In grisly darkness die :

There is no mercy, sure, above!
For ever let me die."

" Almighty God! O do not judge
My poor unhappy child;
She knows not what her lips pronounce,
Her anguish makes her wild.

" My girl, forget thine earthly woe,
And think on God and bliss!
For so, at least, shall not thy soul
Its heavenly bridegroom miss."

" O mother, mother! what is bliss,
And what the fiendis cell?
With him 'tis heaven any where,
Without my William, hell.

" Go out, go out, my lamp of life!
In endless darkness die:
Without him, I must loath the earth,
Without him, scorn the sky."

And so despair did rave and rage
Athwart her boiling veins;
Against the providence of Heaven
She hurl'd her impious strains.

She beat her breast, and wrung her hands,
And roll'd her tearless eye,
From rise of morn till the pale stars
Again did freak the sky.

When hark! abroad she heard the tramp
Of nimble-hoofed steed;
She heard a knight with clank alight,
And climb the stair in speed.

And soon she heard a tinkling hand,
That twirled at the pin ;
And through her door, that open'd not,
These words were breathed in.

“ What ho ! what ho ! thy door undo ;
Art watching or asleep ?
My love, dost yet remember me,
And dost thou laugh or weep ? ”

“ Ah ! William, here so late at night ?
Oh ! I have watch'd and wak'd ;
Whence dost thou come ? for thy return
My heart hath sorely ach'd. ”

“ At midnight only we may ride ;
I come o'er land and sea :
I mounted late, but soon I go ;
Arise, and come with me. ”

“ O ! William, enter first my bower,
And give me one embrace :
The blasts athwart the hawthorn hiss ;
Await a little space. ”

“ The blasts athwart the hawthorn hiss,
I may not harbour here ;
My spur is sharp, my courser paws,
My hour of flight is near.

“ All as thou liest upon the couch,
Arise, and mount behind ;
To-night we'll ride a thousand miles,
The bridal bed to find. ”

“ How ! ride to-night a thousand miles !
Thy love thou dost bemock :

Eleven is the stroke that still
Rings on within the clock."

"Look up ; the moon is bright, and we
Outstride the earthly men :
I'll take thee to the bridal bed,
And night shall end but then."

"And where is then thy house and home ;
And where thy bridal bed?"

"'Tis narrow, silent, chilly, dark ;
Far hence I rest my head."

"And is there any room for me,
Wherein that I may creep?"

"There's room enough for thee and me,
Wherein that we may sleep.

"All as thou liest upon thy couch,
Arise, no longer stop ;
The wedding-guests thy coming wait,
The chamber door is ope."

Then suddenly, as there she lay,
Upon his horse she sprung ;
And with her lily hands so pale
About her William clung.

And hurry-skurry forth they go,
Unheeding wet or dry ;
And horse and rider snort and blow,
And sparkling pebbles fly.

How swift the flood, the mead, the wood,
Aright, aleft, are gone !
The bridges thunder as they pass,
But earthly sound is none.

Tramp, tramp, across the land they speed ;
Splash, splash, across the sea :

“ Hurrah ! the dead can ride apace ;
Dost fear to ride with me ?

“ The moon is bright, and blue the night,
Dost quake the blast to stem ?
Dost shudder, maid, to seek the dead ? ”
“ No, no ; but what of them ?

“ How glumly sounds yon dirgy song ;
Night ravens flap the wing ;
What knell doth slowly toll ding-dong ?
The psalms of death who sing ?

“ It creeps, the swarthy funeral train,
The corse is on the bier ;
Like croak of toads from lonely muirs,
The chant doth meet the ear. ”

“ Go bear her corse, when midnight's past,
With song, and tear, and wail ;
I've got my wife, I take her home—
My hour of wedlock, hail !

“ Lead forth, O clerk, the chanting choir,
To swell our nuptial song ;
Come, priest, and read the blessing soon,
For we are all too long. ”

They heed his call, and hush'd the sound,
The bier was seen no more ;
And follow'd him o'er field and flood
Yet faster than before.

Halloo ! halloo ! away they go,
Unheeding wet or dry ;

And horse and rider snort and blow,
And sparkling pebbles fly.

How swift the hill, how swift the dale,
Aright, aleft, are gone !
By hedge and tree, by thorp and town,
They gallop, gallop on.

Tramp, tramp, across the land they speed ;
Splash, splash, across the sea :
“ Hurrah ! the dead can ride apace ;
Dost fear to ride with me ?

“ Look up, look up, an airy crew
In roundel dances reel :
The moon is bright, and blue the night ;
May'st dimly see them wheel.

“ Come to, come to, ye ghostly crew,
Come to, and follow me ;
And dance for us the wedding dance,
When we asleep shall be.”

And brush, brush, brush, the ghostly crew
Come wheeling o'er their heads,
All rustling like the wither'd leaves
That wide the whirlwind spreads.

Halloo ! halloo ! away they go,
Unheeding wet or dry ;
And horse and rider snort and blow,
And sparkling pebbles fly.

And all that in the moonshine lay
Behind them fled afar ;
And backward scudded, over-head,
The sky, and every star.

G

Tramp, tramp, across the land they speed,
 Splash, splash, across the sea :
 " Hurrah ! the dead can ride apace ;
 Dost fear to ride with me ?

" I ween the cock prepares to crow ;
 The sand will soon be run :
 I snuff the early morning air—
 Down, down ! our work is done.

" The dead, the dead can ride apace ;
 Our wedding here is fit :
 Our race is rode, our journey o'er,
 Our endless union knit."

And, lo ! an iron grated gate
 Soon beckons to their view :
 He crack'd his whip—the clanging bolts,
 The doors, asunder flew.

They pass, and 'twas on graves they trod :
 "'Tis hither we are bound."
 And many a tomb-stone, ghostly white,
 Lay in the moonshine round.

And when he from his steed alight,
 His armour black as cinder,
 Did moulder, moulder all away,
 As it were made of tinder.

His head became a naked skull ;
 No hair nor eyes had he :
 His body grew a skeleton,
 Erewhile so blyth to see.

And at his dry and bony heel
 No spur was left to be ;

And in his wither'd hand you might
The scythe and hour-glass see.

And lo! his steed did 'gin to smoke
And charnel fires outbreathe ;
And pal'd, and bleach'd, then vanish'd quite
The maid from underneath.

And hollow howlings hung in air,
And shrieks from vaults arose ;—
Then knew the maid she might no more
Her living eyes unclose.

But onward to the judgment-seat,
'Through mist and moonlight drear,
The ghostly crew their flight pursue,
And hollow in her ear :—

“ Be patient, though thine heart should break,
Arraign not Heaven's decree ;
Thou now art of thy body reft,
Thy soul forgiven be !”

THE FREEBOOTER.

FROM THE GERMAN OF BÜRGER.

- HIGH on a rock, embower'd in wood,
 In ancient days a castle stood ;
 Its towers, when driving in the vale,
 The post-boy shew'd me with his hand :
 " Those were the terrors of the land,"
 He said, and thus began his tale :—
- With knowing look, he, nodding, said,
 " The treasure in that rock that's laid,
 To grant to me, were Heaven willing,
 I'd tell the king, sir, in a trice,
 ' Pray, on your kingdom set a price ;
 I'd not be driving for a shilling.'
- " Of many a one, as I am told,
 The mouth has water'd for this gold ;
 But Christ have mercy, Heaven befriend !
 A coal-black hound, with iron jaws,
 With eyes of fire, and monstrous claws,
 Has brought them to untimely end.
- " Once only ev'ry seven years,
 On Christmas-eve, a flame appears :
 With hollow groans, and rustling wind,
 The treasure rises from the ground,
 Watch'd by black goat instead of hound ;
 And that's the time to lay the fiend.
- " If from this goat, mark well the snare,
 You do not pluck one milk-white hair,
 (Ever such the ways of evil !)

Headlong you're tumbled down the rock,
Your body's mangled with the shock,
Your soul is hurried to the devil.

“ From Old Nick's wiles deliver me !
From lords and law, pray keep me free !
With neither will I have to do.
By no agreement think to win ;
Spite of all clause, they'll take you in ;
They'll read it X instead of U.

“ Treasure-digging and Lottery,
Fortune-hunting and Alchymy,
Lead only to despair and strife :
My saying is this,—rise early,
Work steady, and live orderly,
And Heaven above will bless your life.

“ A baron grim, grown old in crimes,”
The post-boy said, “ in former times
Within those walls conceal'd his gold ;
With horse, and foot, and warlike car,
Ravag'd the country near and far,
And brought his plunder to this hold.

“ To ravage, murder, rob, or burn,
Afforded joy to him in turn ;
Threats he fear'd not, sword, or halter :
Was ought to get, dash in a crack
He had it, and as snug was back
In den as strong as Gibraltar.

“ Such fright prevail'd in neighb'ring town,
The men scarce call'd their souls their own,
His name drove women into fits :
Justices weigh and plan in vain,
Consult, resolve, and plan again ;
They counsell'd till they lost their wits.

- “ A hag was ta'en, a lump of sins,
She'd made the children swallow pins,
Dry'd cows, and play'd such devil's tricks:
Jack Ketch, as valet to this witch,
Had laid her nicely dress'd in pitch,
On couch of faggot and of sticks.
- “ ‘ Hold,’ she cried, ‘ don't put the fire on :
Down I'll fetch the grim old baron !’
The mayor agreed, had her unbound,
Promis'd a patent free from harm,
To conjure, use her spells, and charm,
And safely witch the land around.
- “ Such bargain seems a foolish thing,
Such as to us no gain would bring,
· But Satan's friends ne'er act as one :
From broils of rogues good will ensue,
This hell-hound to her word prov'd true ;
What she agreed was fairly done.
- “ Chang'd to a toad at time of rest,
She crawl'd up to the robber's nest,
(By hocus pocus she'd this knack),
Of his best steed then took the form ;
And when the cock crow'd in the morn,
Full-arm'd he vaulted on her back.
- “ With thund'ring course now flew our witch,
O'er rocks and walls, o'er hedge and ditch :
The baron pull'd till black in face,
And curs'd, and kick'd ; but all in vain,
She heeded neither spurs nor rein,
Nor stopp'd till in the market-place.
- “ With scrapes and sneers he's handed down ;
Your Lordship's welcome to our town ;
Good quarters are prepar'd for you :

Every dog, Sir, has his day ;
 Your courtesy we'll now repay ;
 Our hangman shall the honours do.

“ Soon the rogue was brought to trial ;
 Facts were prov'd beyond denial :
 In iron cage he was confin'd.
 Lest at morn he should be sick,
 They daily gave him an emetic ;
 And then he with Duke Humphry din'd.

“ The hangman, vers'd in deeds of blood,
 With hellish torment, cut for food
 Limbs from off this famish'd sinner.
 And when he'd eaten the last stump,
 They broil'd his stomach and his rump,
 And serv'd them up for dinner.

“ And when he'd eat himself all up,
 And nought remain'd to dine or sup,
 The devil took his soul away.
 Great was the triumph of the town !
 In this Court-hall the truth's well known :
 The cage hangs up unto this day.

“ This cage, Sir, often brings to mind
 Those dealers in the human kind ;”
 (Thus my driver's story ended) :

“ Were they shut in't, and taught to feel
 Mis'ries they on the world entail,
 Their manners might be mended.”

Scarce had the lad his hist'ry done,
 When up came Monsieur San Facon
 And stops our carriage, bids us rise,—
 Tumbles all our luggage over ;
 Lur'd with hopes that he'd discover
 Something that had not paid th' Excise.