

Tibbie Pagan

In the British Museum, London, is to be seen the only copy of the poems of Tibbie Pagan, the Muirkirk poetess, of which the writer is aware. There is not a copy in the Scottish National Library in Edinburgh. Some people, indeed, did not believe that such a book every existed, but on a recent visit to London I had a look over the volume. It is a small thin book, bound partly in leather, and extends to 76 pages. Title page:—

A
COLLECTION
of
SONGS AND POEMS
ON
SEVERAL OCCASIONS
BY
ISABEL PAGAN

But a' the whole tract of my time,
I found myself inclin'd to rhyme;
When I see merry company,
I sing a song with mirth and glee

Glasgow:

Printed by Niven, Napier, & Khull,
Trongate.

1803

Then follows the

TITLES OF POEMS AND SONGS

Account of the Author's Lifetime.
On Burns and Ramsay.
The Putting Begins.
A Hunting Song.
Mr T———r's Lament for the Loss of
His Comrade.
The Spinning Wheel.
The Gear and the Blathrie O't.
Song.
Remarks on Evil Speakers who would not
live at Peace.
A New Song.
Muirkirk Light Weights.
An Observe on Extortioner's Wives.
Lament for the Herring.
The Laird o' Glenlee.
A Letter to a Gentleman on the Death of His
Pointer.
A Love Letter.
Aighlen Spring.
Hunting of the Shaw.
Muirkirk March.
A Letter.
Snuffy Peter.
B———'s Death.
A New Song.
A Return of Thankfulness for Past Favours.
A New Song.
A New Song.

A New Song on the Times.
Skit on an Auld Huntsman.
Shepherd's Lamentations.
McLellan's Lament for His Master's Death.
A New Love Song, with the Answer.
The Answer.
A Love Song.
Friendship.
A New Song.
A New Song.
Song.
A Visit to the Sorn to see some Persons.
A New Song.
A New Song.
A Love Song.
Observations on a Sermon preached at
Muirkirk by a Missionary Minister.
On the Bad Behaviour of a Servant who has
going to turn off his Neighbours.
An Observation on some men talking of
Going Abroad.

Lingering Lazy Johnny.

A New Song.

The first poem is an

ACCOUNT OF THE AUTHOR'S LIFE- TIME

I was born near four miles from Nithhead,
Where fourteen years I got my bread;
My learning it can soon be told,
Ten weeks when I was seven years old,
With a good old religious wife,
Who lived a quiet and sober life;
Indeed she took of me more pains,
Than some does now with forty bairns.
With my attention and her skill,
I read the Bible no' that ill,
An' when I grew a wee thocht mair,
I read when I had time to spare,
But a' the whole tract of my time,
I found myself inclined to rhyme;
When I see merry company,
I sing a song with mirth and glee,
And sometimes I the whisky pree,
But 'deed its best to let it be.
A' my faults I will not tell,
I scarcely ken them a' mysel';
I've come through various scenes of life,
Yet never was a married wife.

The second poem is

ON BURNS AND RAMSAY

Now Burns and Ramsay both are dead,
Although I cannot them succeed;
Yet here I'll try my natural skill,
And hope you will not take it ill.
You know their learning was not sma',
And mine is next to nae at a';
Theirs must be brighter far than mine,
Because I'm much on the decline.
I hope the public will excuse
What I have done here by my Muse,
As different men are of different minds,
My metre is of different kinds.
The last verse of "The Putting Begins"
runs—

My name is Pagan, I lived at Muir-mill,
My learning's so weak, how can I speak
with skill?

But yet I take pleasure these verses to sing,
Success to the hunting, and God save the
King.

MUIRKIRK LIGHT WEIGHTS

In Muirkirk there lives a taylor,
He scrimpit weight for greed of siller;
He scrimpit weight, he counts not fair,
Till he's made three hundred pounds and
mare.

The oldest dealer he did say,
What will be said at the last day?
The taylor said, ne'er mind the last,
If we can but make money fast,
There will be large allowance gaun
For every dealer in the land.

THE SPINNING WHEEL

When I sit at my spinning wheel,
And think on every station,
I think I'm happiest mysel
At my small occupation.
No court, no freet, or dark debate
Can e'er attend my dwelling,
While I make cloth of different sorts,
Which is an honest calling.

Indeed you know the nights are long,
And sometimes I do weary,
But, as they'll shortly turn again,
I hope I'll grow more cheery.
I'll sing a song with noble glee,
And tune that I think canty;
But I sing best, it is no jest,
When the tobacco's plenty.

I live content, I pay no rent,
In my quiet habitation,
For B———e he did order it,
Which shows his great discretion,
To favour one so low as me
While I was no relation;
But now he's dead and in the clay
I hope he's won the blessing.

M'A———m brave, agrees to this
Kind, honest disposition,
He's charitable, just, and true,
Not like most men of fashion.
I have no reason here to fret
That I was never married,
Since I a free possession get
O freedom I'm not worried.
For when around me I do look
And see the merchants dealing,
For they do triple profit take
For everything they're selling;
For honesty is grown so weak,
It is so old a fashion,
'Tis not regarded in our day—
'Tis scarce throughout the nation.
Kind Providences sent a good crop,
For to support our nation,
But Satan's crew sent it abroad,
Which is a sad vexation,

That ere such blackguard vagabonds
Should have a habitation
Below our British government,
That takes this occupation.

A NEW SONG

Although I have no company
Yet cheerfully I'll sing,
I hope M'————m will win the plea,
Good news to us to bring.
The work it has been dull this while,
But now its got a turn,
Weel may he prosper in his way,
Long may his tar kilns burn.

Chorus

Rejoice, ye colliers, all rejoice,
Cheer up your hearts to sing,
The fine appearance of the coal
To us great honour bring.
Although the colliers they rejoice,
The merchants they may mourn,
They'll get their cash at twa week's end,
Which is a clever turn.
For money is better than company's lines,
By which men are oppressed,
If you get your money in your hand
You'll war't as you think best.

Rejoice, etc.

The foregoing are a few of the efforts in the booklet. Is it not passing strange that what are considered by repute two of Tibbie's best poems—"Ca' the Yowes tae the Knowes," and "The Crook and Plaid," are not mentioned in the volume? The former is in all editions of Burns' poems. There are two versions, but both versions have the same chorus-

Ca' the yowes to the knowes,
Ca' them where the heather grows,
Ca' them where the burnie rowes,
My bonie dearie.

The first stanza of one runs—

As I gaed doon the water-side,
There I met my shepherd lad;
He row'd me sweetly in his plaid,
An' ca'd me his dearie.

With regard to this version the Masonic Edition of Burns has this note—"The original of this is generally attributed to Isabel or Tibbie Pagan, a singular character, who died in the neighbourhood of Muirkirk, Ayrshire, in 1821, aged eighty. The poet, curiously, appears not to have known of Tibbie. Mrs Burns was fond of singing the song, and used to point out that the second verse—"Will ye gang doon the waterside," and also the closing one were wholly her husband's own. Writing to Thomson, Burns says—"When I gave it to Johnston I added some stanza to the song and mended others." "

The first stanza of the other version is—

Hark the mavis' e'ening sang
Sounding Clouden's woods amang;
Then a-faulding let us gang
My bonnie dearie.

In connection with this version the note has it—"Written for Thomson in 1794, this is the second song on the same subject, and the genuine Burns every line."

Now, Tibbie says "Burns and Ramsay both are dead." Can anyone hazard an opinion why at least "Ca' the Yowes" is not in Tibbie's volume? It is not under any other title.

A few weeks ago we gave a short resume of Tibbie Pagan's book, "A Collection of Songs and Poems on Several Occasions," which evoked much interest, and it is perhaps right that any first-hand information with regard to this local poetess and contemporary of Burns should be put on record.

It is not such a far cry to Tibbie Pagan's time after all, and we are sure it is not common knowledge that the mother of the late Mr John Hodge, Sen., of the Baird Institute, and the late Mr James M. Hodge of Furnace Road (Mrs George Hodge, nee Leizie McEwan) was as a girl Tibbie's constant companion while she was at home in her cottage by the Garpel Water. The information here given was communicated from the lips of Mrs Hodge (or Granny Hodge as she was familiarly called in her later years) to the present generation of relatives. Granny Hodge's parents resided in the Coutburn Row, a little beyond Springhill on the Sanquhar Road.

For a living Tibbie went about the herd's houses in the Muirkirk, Kirkconnel, and Sanquhar districts doing a week's sewing, darning, knitting, or nursing as required, while she was the star turn at rockings with her songs and stories. (A rocking was a friendly visit in which neighbours met during the moonlight nights of winter and spring, and spent the evening alternately in one another's houses). In winter, when snow or other circumstances prevented her visiting the herds, she spun wool for them. Naturally she came a lot about the home of Granny Hodge's people.

In her later years Granny Hodge had a little shop, and sold brown robin, treacle ale, biscuits, etc., and when the treacle ale bottles plunked their own accord, the boys (especially her relations) were ready and willing to assist with the disappearance of the luxury, and who knows but that they also assisted with the spontaneous (?) plunking!