My Father was a Farmer

My father was a farmer upon the Carrick border O
And carefully he bred me, in decency & order O
He bade me act a manly part, though I had ne'er a farthing O
For without an honest manly heart, no man was worth regarding O
Chorus Row de dow &c.

Then out into the world my course I did determine. O
Tho' to be rich was not my wish, yet to be great was charming. O
My talents they were not the worst, nor yet my education: O
Resolv'd was I, at least to try, to mend my situation. O

In many a way, & vain essay, I courted fortune's favor; O
Some cause unseen, still stept between, & frustrate each endeavor; O
Some times by foes I was o'erpowers'd, sometimes by friends forsaken; O
And when my hope was at the top, I still was worst mistaken. O

Then sore harass'd, & tir'd at last, with fortune's vain delusion; O
I dropt my schemes, like idle dreams and came to this conclusion; O
The past wast bad, & the future hid; its good or ill untried; O
But the present hour was in my pow'r, & so I would enjoy it, O

No help, nor hope, nor view had I; nor person to befriend me; O
So I must toil, & sweat & moil, & labor to sustain me, O
To plough & sow, to reap & mow, my father bred me early, O
For one, he said, to labor bred, was a match for fortune fairly, O

Thus all obscure, unknown, & poor, thro' life I'm doom'd to wander, O
Till down my weary bones I lay in everlasting slumber: O
No view nor care, but shun whate'er might breed me pain or sorrow; O
I live today as well as I may, regardless of tomorrow, O

But cheerful still, I am as well as a Monarch in a palace; O
Tho' fortune's frown still hunts me down with all her wonted malice: O
I make indeed, my daily bread, but ne'er can make it farther; O
But as daily bread is all I heed, I do not much regard her. O
When sometimes by my labor I earn a little money, O
Some unforeseen misfortune comes generally upon me; O
Mischance, mistake, or by neglect, or my good natur d folly; O
But come what will I ve sworn it still, I ll ne er be melancholy, O

All you who follow wealth & power with unremitting ardor, O
The more in this you look for bliss, you leave your view the farther; O
Had you the wealth Potosi boasts, or nations to adore you, O
A cheerfull honest-hearted clown I will prefer before you. O
To Ruin.

All hail! inexorable lord!
At whose destruction-breathing word,
    The mightiest empires fall!
Thy cruel, woe-delighted train,
The ministers of Grief and Pain,
    A sullen welcome, all!
With stern-resolv d, despairing eye,
    I see each aimed dart;
For one has cut my dearest tye,
    And quivers in my heart.
    Then low ring, and pouring,
    The Storm no more I dread;
    Tho' thick ning, and black ning,
    Round my devoted head.

And thou grim Pow'r, by Life abhorr'd,
While Life a pleasure can afford,
    Oh! hear a wretch's pray'r!
No more I shrink appall'd, afraid;
I court, I beg thy friendly aid,
    To close this scene of care!
When shall my soul, in silent peace,
Resign Life's joyless day?
My weary heart its throbings cease,
    Cold-mould ring in the clay?
    No fear more, no tear more,
    To stain my lifeless face,
Enclasped, and grasped,
    Within thy cold embrace!
The Death and Dying Words of Poor Mailie,

The Author’s Only Pet Yowe,  
An Unco Mournfu’ Tale  

As Mailie, an her lambs thegither,  
Was ae day nibbling on the tether,  
Upon her cloot she coost a hitch,  
An’ owre she warrs d in the ditch:  
There, groaning, dying, she did ly,  
When Hughoc¹ he cam doytan by.

Wi’ glowrin een, an lifted han’s  
Poor Hughoc like a statue stan’s;  
He saw her days were near hand ended,  
But, waes my heart! he could na mend it!  
He gaped wide, but naething spak,  
At length poor Mailie silence brak.

O thou, whase lamentable face  
Appears to mourn my woefu’ case!  
My dying words attentive hear,  
An bear them to my Master dear.

Tell him, if e’er again he keep  
As muckle gear as buy a sheep,  
O, bid him never tye them mair,  
Wi’ wicked strings o’ hemp or hair!  
But ca them out to park or hill,  
An’ let them wander at their will:

So, may his flock increase an’ grow  
To scores o’ lambs, an’ packs of woo!  
Tell him, he was a Master kin’,  
An’ ay was guid to me an’ mine;

¹ A neibor herd-callan [Burns s note].

and; together  
one  
hoof; cast  
over; wriggled  
lie  
came stumbling  
with glowering eyes; hands  
stands  
woe is; not  
nothing spoke  
broke  
whose  
woeful  
and  
much wealth  
its; more  
with; of  
drive  
and  
wool  
kind  
and always; good  
neighbour herd-lad
An now my dying charge I gie him,
My helpless lambs, I trust them wi’ him.

O, bid him save their harmless lives,
Fрае dogs an’ tods, an’ butchers’ knives!
But gie them guid cow-milk their fill,
Till they be fit to fend themsel;
An’ tent them duely, e’en an’ morn,
Wi’ taets o’ hay an’ rippes o’ corn.

An’ may they never learn the gaets,
Of ither vile, wanrestfu’ Pets!
To slink thro’ slaps, an’ reave an’ steal,
At stacks o’ pease, or stocks o’ kail.
So may they, like their great forbears,
For monie a year come thro’ the sheers:
So wives will gie them bits o’ bread,
An’ bairns greet for them when they’re dead.

My poor toop-lamb, my son an’ heir,
O, bid him breed him up wi’ care!
An’ if he live to be a beast,
To pit some havins in his breast!
An’ warn him ay at ridin’ time,
To stay content wi’ yowes at hame;
An’ no to rin’ an’ wear his clouts,
Like ither menseless, graceless brutes.

An’ niest my yowie, silly thing,
Gude keep thee frae a tether string!
O, may thou ne’er forgather up,
Wi’ onie blastet, moorlan’ toop;
But aye keep mind to moop an’ mell,
Wi’ sheep o’ credit like thyself!

And now, my bairns, wi’ my last breath,
I lea’e my blessin’ wi’ you baith:
An’ when ye think upo’ your Mither,
Mind to be kind to ane anither.
Now, honest Hughoc, dinna fail,
To tell my Master a my tale;
An bid him burn this cursed tether,
An for thy pains thou se get my blather.

This said, poor Mailie turn d her head,
An clos d her een amang the dead!
Poor Mailie’s Elegy.

Lament in rhyme, lament in prose, Wi’ saut tears trickling down your nose; Our Bardie’s fate is at a close, Past a remead! The last, sad cape-stane of his woes; Poor Mailie’s dead!

It’s no the loss o’ warl’s gear, That could sae bitter draw the tear, Or make our Bardie, dowie, wear The mourning weed: He’s lost a friend and neebor dear, In Mailie dead.

Thro’ the town she trotted by him; A lang half-mile she could descry him, Wi’ kindly bleat, when she did spy him, She ran wi speed: A friend mair faithful ne’er came nigh him, Than Mailie dead.

I wat she was a sheep o’ sense, An’ could behave hersel wi’ mense: I’ll say t, she never brak a fence, Thro’ thievish greed. Our Bardie, lanely, keeps the spence Sin Mailie’s dead.

Or, if he wanders up the howe, Her living image in her yowe, Comes bleating till him, owre the knowe, For bits o’ bread; An’ down the briny pearls rowe For Mailie dead.
She was nae get o’ moorlan tips, no offspring; rams
Wi’ tauted ket, an’ hairy hips; tangled fleece
For her forbears were brought in ships, from beyond
Frac’ yont the TWEED.
A bonier fleece ne’r cross’d the clips prettier fleece never; clippers
Than Mailie’s dead.

Wae worth that man wha first did shape woe; who
That vile, wanchancie thing a raep! unlucky; rope
It maks guid fellows giri an’ gape,
Wi’ chokin’ dread;
An’ Robin’s bonnet wave wi’ crape choking
For Mailie dead.

O, a’ ye Bards on bonie DOON! all
An’ wha on AIRE your chanters tune! who; pipes
Come, join the melancholious croon moan
O’ Robin’s reed!
His heart will never get aboon! reed-pipe
His Mailie’s dead!
Mary Morison

O Mary at thy window be,
   It is the wish'd the trysted hour,
Those smiles & glances let me see,
   That make the miser's treasure poor.
How blythely wad I bide the stoure,
   A weary slave frae sun to sun,
Could I the rich reward secure,
   The lovely Mary Morison!

Yestreen when to the trembling string
   The dance gaed through the lighted ha',
To thee my fancy took its wing,
   I sat, but neither heard, nor saw:
Though this was fair, & that was braw,
   And yon the toast of a' the town,
I sigh'd, & said amang them a',
   Ye are na Mary Morison.

O Mary canst thou wreck his peace
   Wha for thy sake wad gladly die.
Or canst thou break that heart of his,
   Whase only faute is loving thee!
If love for love thou wilt na gie,
   At least be pity to me shown,
A thought ungentle canna be
   The thought o' Mary Morison.
On a Noisy Polemic.

Below thir stanes lie Jamie’s banes;
O Death, it’s my opinion,
Thou ne’er took such a bleth ran b[j]itch,
Into thy dark dominion!

death; bones

talkative nuisance

For the Author’s Father.

O ye whose cheek the tear of pity stains,
Draw near with pious reverence and attend!
Here lie the loving Husband’s dear remains,
The tender Father, and the generous Friend.
The pitying Heart that felt for human Woe;
The dauntless heart that fear’d no human Pride;
The Friend of Man, to vice alone a foe;
For ev’n his failings lean’d to Virtue’s side. ¹

¹ Goldsmith [Burns’ footnote, referring to Oliver Goldsmith’s The Deserted Village (1770), line 164].
When Guilford good our Pilot stood,
   An did our hellim thaw, man,
   Ae night, at tea, began a plea,
   Within America, man:
Then up they gat the maskin-pat,
   And in the sea did jaw, man;
An did nae less, in full Congress,
   Than quite refuse our law, man.

Then thro' the lakes Montgomery takes,
   I wat he was na slaw, man;
Down Lowrie's burn he took a turn,
   And Cornwallis, man:
But yet, whatreck, he, at Quebec,
   Montgomery-like did fa', man,
Wi' sword in hand, before his band,
   Amang his en mies a', man.

Poor Tammy G[a]ge within a cage
   Was kept at Boston-ha', man;
Till Willie H[ow]e took o'er the knowe
   For Philadelphia, man:
Wi' sword an' gun he thought a sin
   Guid Christian bluid to draw, man;
But at New-Y ork, wi' knife an' fork,
   Sir Loin he hacked sma', man.

Bushy boughs gaed up, like spur an' whip,
   Till Fraser brave did fa', man;
Then lost his way, ae misty day,
   In Saratoga shaw, man.
Cornwallis fought as lang as he dought,
   An did the Buckskins claw, man;
But Cl[i]nt[i]o'n's glaive frae rust to save
   He hung it to the wa', man.
Then Montague, an' Guilford too,
Began to fear a fa', man;
And Sackville doure, who stood the stoure,
The German Chief to throw, man:
For Paddy Burke, like any Turk,
Nae mercy had at a', man;
An Charlie Fox threw by the box,
An lows his tinkler jaw man.

Then Rockham took up the game;
Till Death did on him ca', man;
When Shelburne meek held up his cheek,
Conform to Gospel law, man:
Saint Stephen's boys, wi' jarring noise,
They did his measures throw, man,
For North an' Fox united stocks,
An bore him to the wa', man.

Then Clubs an' Hearts were Charlie's cartes,
He swept the stakes awa', man,
Till the Diamond's Ace, of Indian race,
Led him a sair faux pas, man:
The Saxon lads, wi' loud placads,
On Chatham's Boy did ca', man;
An Scotland drew her pipe an' blew,
Up, Willie, waurn them a', man!

Behind the throne then Grenville's gone,
A secret word or twa, man;
While slee Dundas arous'd the class
Be-north the Roman wa', man: Hadrian's Wall, the Scottish border
An Chatham's wraith, in heav'ly graith,
(Inspired Bardies saw, man)
Wi' kindling eyes cry d, Willie, rise!
Would I hae fear d them a', man!

14
But, word an' blow, No'froth, Fo'fx, and Co.
Gowff'd Willie like a ba, man,
Till Suthron raise, an' coost their claise
Behind him in a raw, man:
An Caledon threw by the drone,
An' did her whittle draw, man;
An swoor fu' rude, thro' dirt an' blood,
To mak it guid in law, man.

* * *

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