

**THE LAIRD'S  
LYKEWAKE AND  
OTHER POEMS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649624157

The Laird's Lykewake and Other Poems by Alexander G. Murdoch & George Gilfillan

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

[www.triestepublishing.com](http://www.triestepublishing.com)

**ALEXANDER G. MURDOCH & GEORGE GILFILLAN**

**THE LAIRD'S  
LYKEWAKE AND  
OTHER POEMS**



THE LAIRD'S LYKEWAKE

AND

OTHER POEMS.

BY

ALEXANDER G. MURDOCH,

*Author of "Lilla on the Doric Lyre."*

WITH AN INTRODUCTORY PREFACE BY

REV. GEORGE GILFILLAN,

DUNDEE.

LONDON: SIMPKIN, MARSHALL, & CO.  
EDINBURGH AND GLASGOW: JOHN MENZIES & CO.

1877.

23445.33



*Gift of English Dept.*

PRINTED BY  
JOHN LENG & CO.,  
DUNDEE ADVERTISER OFFICE.

## INTRODUCTORY PREFACE.

---

MR ALEXANDER MURDOCH requests me to write a few words of recommendatory Preface to his volume of Poems. This I do with pleasure. He is one of our best recent recruits to the school of Poets who went by the name of the "Whistlebinkie School," many of whom were real accessions to the list of our genuine Scottish Minstrels. Most of them, indeed, might never have tuned their lyres at all but for Burns, but still they were not slavish imitators of the Ayrshire Poet; and, working in the same exhaustless mine of Scottish customs, character, and scenery, they have brought out a great deal that is new and valuable. The imitators of Pope found themselves in a vacuum—they might have the style and even some of the genius, but they had no new manners or phases of character to describe in England. It was used up completely, and hence, while some degenerated into mere twaddle and sound, Goldsmith, the best of them, had to go to Ireland, in his "Deserted Village," and to the Continent, in his "Traveller," in search of new matter for his muse. But Scotland, till Burns arose,

"Lay like some unheard-of Isle  
Ayont Magellan."

And even after what he and Scott and Galt and Wilson did for its discovery and disinterment, there remained a great deal to do, and our Westland bards and Scottish novelists have not even yet exhausted its rough and fineless riches.

A great deal of true Scottish raciness is to be found in Mr Murdoch's verses. The first poem which I remember perusing when it first appeared is entitled the "Laird's Lykewake," and in part fulfils what had long been a cherished ideal of ours—the poetry and interest of a Lykewake. We remember well when

that curious old Scottish custom was in full vogue, and was observed in respectable as well as poor houses, and have been present at one or two celebrations of it. There was a strange combination of elements in its observance, which gave it a weird and eery aspect, half ludicrous and half terrible. In a corner of the room reposed the cold corpse of what had been perhaps the day before an eminent preacher of the Gospel, who had died full of vigour, although at his grand climacteric, of a very short and alarming illness; or else of some young and promising individual who had perished of a wasting disease, with the salt on his breast, and a heart-beard whisper so stilly low, which seemed to say, "It is for ever." In the centre of the table, which stood in the middle of the room, stood a giant bottle of smuggled whisky, flanked by oatcakes and a kebbock. Stationed around the room were a variety of persons, young and old, grave and gay; here a solemn elder quoting texts of Scripture, at first in a clear unembarrassed tone, by-and-bye with a slight hiccup, as the *aqua* did its office, and the morning light was approaching; and there a professed jester—the jester of the village, a stocking-weaver to trade—with a demure, hypocritical air in his waggish features, which by-and-bye, under the same genial influence, warmed and waukened till his every word was a quip, and his every sentence a droll story, and the room, the bottle, the guests, and the bed on which the corpse was lying, shook with unextinguishable laughter; and yonder a boy of thirteen, who, between the sorrowful feelings awakened by the recent death and the sight of his father's body, and the ludicrous emotions started by the strange stories, became a mere pendulum between a smile and tear, and found his only relief in looking out, from time to time, on the night, and seeing the Great Bear slowly lifting up his mighty stature toward the zenith, and by-and-bye the first peep of the late October dawning tinging the eastern horizon and unshadowing the northern mountains. It was strange how the awe at first felt in the presence of a corpse, and the superstitious dread of some lest demons should snatch it away, and the love and sorrow for the departed, gradually yielded to the



other extreme of mirth, even as of all dinners that succeeding a funeral is often the most redolent of laughter. Such a thing of shreds and patches, of contradictions and sharp contrasts, is Human Nature, and such a unique discovery of human nature was a "Scottish Lykewake." Mr Murdoch's poem, the "Lykewake," if not quite up to the mark of a subject worthy of a Shakespeare or Burns, is a very clever production, and some of its tales, besides being entertaining, contain touches of genius.

There is a spirited poem on "Drunclog," in the style of Macaulay's "Lays of the Roundheads." Better than this is the "Midnight Forge," reminding us somewhat of Samuel Fergusson's massive "Forging of the Anchor." The following lines deserve quotation :—

"Bring out the molten monster, then, he's ready, he's aglow,  
 And force his sides to battle with the steam god's crushing blow ;  
 Hang on the cranes ! heave out the chains ! the white mass swings in air ;  
 Heavens ! what a scorching heat he casts, and what a blinding glare.  
 As white as seething foam he glows, and every bursting pore  
 Throbs with the fevered blood of fire, and spouts the molten gore.  
 O ! in the sturdy olden days of foray and of fight,  
 When frequent in our Scottish hills arose the beacon light,  
 Had such another molten mass as this been lifted high,  
 Its gleaming terrors would have scared the white stars from the sky,  
 Flashed down a gray and angry glare on startled crag and lawn,  
 Disturbing the wild eagles' sleep with dreams of early dawn ;  
 Aroused the burgher of the town, the shepherd of the glen,  
 And put the sword-hilts in the grasp of roughly honest men."

In his "Miscellaneous Poems and Sonnets" Mr Murdoch seems to say, "*Paullo majora canamas.*" These poems are in English, and written with more effort and elaboration than his Scotch verses. And such poems as "The Poet's Mission," "Behold the Man !" "John Bunyan in Prison," and his very striking strain entitled a "Hymn to the Stars," written at midnight in Glencoe, must be attractive to a class of readers who may care less for his "Kirs'nen o' the Bairn," or "When the Bairns are laid in Sleep." It says much, however, for the versatility of the Poet's powers that he has written poems of nearly equal merit in both languages, although we, for our part, prefer his English verses. The first two stanzas of the "Hymn to the Stars" strike us as almost sublime.

Very notable, also, are his poems of kindred purpose and power, entitled "Robert Burns," and the "Burns Statue," which are sure to be read with peculiar interest in this year of grace 1877, when the Glasgow working men have done such honour to themselves and their city in erecting a Statue to the Poet, contributed to in shillings, and where every shilling implied self-sacrifice. These two poems we might quote, but the book containing them is already in our readers' hands, who will see in Mr Murdoch's strong chisel

"A brawny peasant, mired with clay, and rough with honest toil;  
A ploughman striding manfully across the furrowed soil;  
The sunlight on his bare bold brow, and in his heaving breast  
The lion leap and flash of song that robbed him of his rest."

In tenderer and more pathetic strains his "By a Poet's Grave" mourns over the fate of a hapless son of genius—the late James Macfarlane, of whose collected poems we are glad to learn that an edition has been promised by Mr H. Buchanan M'Phail, of Glasgow, an early friend of the Poet's, and in whose family lair the neglected and unfortunate bard now sleeps.

Had space permitted we might have mentioned as very good in a different style the "Rent Day," "That Bates a'," "Blythe Johnny Maut," "Flittin' Day," "The Hoose Takin'," and in another style still "Expiation," and "Alpine, the King Slayer." But our purpose is now accomplished in recommending Mr Murdoch's book as one of great and varied merit. It is quite evident that the book has faults, and would be greatly improved by a little more *labor limæ*. But what gratifies us most about it is that we think we see marks of distinct growth and advancement, and that the Author is writing a great deal better since his first poems appeared, and we entertain high hopes—on the condition of his writing better and better still—as to his future career.

GEORGE GILFILLAN.

DUNDEE, 25th January 1877.

## CONTENTS.

	PAGE
<b>THE LAIRD'S LYKEWAKE,</b> ...	
The Cobbler's Tale; or the Fourteen Fingers o' the Deil,	9
The Dominic's Story; or the Death o' Auld Auntie Gartley,	18
The Wabster's Tale; or the Wa'gaun o' Wee Neil,	21
The Tailor's Tale; or the Kirkyard Chase, ...	23
The Sowdie's Tale; or the Howdie's Noddy, ...	25
The Blacksmith's Story; or the Stranger's Wraith, ...	30
	33
<b>READINGS.</b>	
The Battle of Drumclog, ...	41
The "Strike" of the Poets, ...	45
The Midnight Forge, ...	48
The Ne'erday Snaw-Wraith, ...	50
The Hoose-Tap: A Tale o' Twa Cats, ...	53
The Muse o' Burns, ...	56
Wha Begoud it? A Tale of a Tail, ...	58
Alpine the King Slayer, ...	61
Dyvor Tam, ...	68
The Dingin'-doon Days, ...	70
Expiation! ...	72
Blythe Johnny Maut, ...	74
The Flittin' Day, ..	77
The Hoose-Takin', ...	80
The Rent Day, ...	82
That Bates a'! ...	86
<b>MISCELLANEOUS POEMS.</b>	
The Poet's Mission, ...	89
Behold the Man! ...	91
John Bunyan in Prison, ...	93
Hymn to the Stars, ...	95
When the Bairns are laid in Sleep, ...	97
A Thousand Years! ...	98
The Light of the World, ...	100
Scotiana, ...	102
A Cry from the Heart, ...	104
The Stricken Hearth, ...	106
A Morning Walk, ...	107
Sedan, ...	108
The Lyre of Scotland, ...	109
The Drawn Blinds, ...	112
A Walk in Early Spring, ...	113
O' Wind that Bloweth, ...	115
Death—the Wrecker, ...	116
Robert Burns, ...	117
The Kirs'nen o' the Bairn, ...	118
Milton—a Sonnet, ...	121
The Burn and the Bard, ...	122
Aurea Medocritas, ...	124
Prometheus on the Rocks—a Sonnet, ...	125
The Fu' Wee Wifiekie, ...	126
To a City Sparrow on a Snawy Morning, ...	127
By a Poet's Grave, ...	129