

**THE LADDIE'S
LAMENTATION ON THE
LOSS O' HIS WHITTLE, AND
OTHER POEMS**

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The laddie's lamentation on the loss o' his whittle, and other poems by Robert Leighton

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ROBERT LEIGHTON

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The Laddie's Lamentation

ON

The Loss o' His Whittle,

AND OTHER POEMS.

By ROBERT LEIGHTON.



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PREFACE.

THE very favourable reception given to "Scotch Words" and "The Bapteeement o' the Bairn," and the frequently expressed desire for more of Robert Leighton's Scottish Poems—especially "The Laddie's Lamentation on the loss o' his Whittle"—in a similar easily accessible form, have induced the issue of the present small collection.

Most of the pieces selected have already appeared in the large volume of poems published in 1866; but several have had no other publicity than that derived from the columns of a newspaper, and may be considered as now appearing for the first time.

"The Whittle" was one of the author's earliest productions. About thirty years ago he wrote from Dundee that he had gained some local fame by reciting it at evening parties, and that he had been so much pressed for copies that he had got some printed on loose sheets for distribution. It has since then appeared from time to time in various forms, and is still as fresh and popular as ever.

His own rendering of it was so full of reality and humour that in company he was frequently asked to recite it, and so long as he continued able, he was seldom asked in vain. During his residence in Ayr, the annual celebrations of the 25th of January at Burns's Cottage were never allowed to pass without this contribution to the evening's entertainment. Even on the occasion of the Centenary of 1859, though his own feeling was against the introduction of anything not directly related to the topic of the evening, he was compelled to defer to the wishes of others and give it once more.

The following extract from a letter to a poetical friend, dated 30th Jan., 1859, alludes both to this and to another more appropriate poem, which will be found in the present collection:—
"Now that I am begun to settle down after the glorious and never-to-be-forgotten 25th (*our* King's birth-day), I have time to acknowledge your famous letter of the 21st, which I need hardly tell you 'thrilled my heart-strings a' to the life.' I send you a newspaper, which gives a fair report of our gathering in the 'auld clay biggin,' but it gives a miserably poor impression, compared with the thing itself.

"It was one continued outpouring of enthusiasm, yet all in the

most perfect order and regularity. It was a great and glorious success; every one seemed to be inspired, as I doubt not we were, and anything we had to do came off as if each had been animated by the very presence of the godlike ploughman. The Chairman's speech I am sure you will admire. It was a perfect soul-burst, and will turn out to be the speech of the Centenary without the smallest doubt. Just compare it with any other you drop upon; and if you meet in with one as good, let me know of it.

"I had a good deal to do throughout the night, and, in everything, came off with flying colours. First, by particular request, and by way of interlude, I gave 'The Whittle,' amid laughter and applause. The chair pronounced it 'a genuine thing,' and there was no end of demands for copies. But what pleased me most was the announcement by a Sheffield gentleman, that if I lost one whittle I should find another, for he would send me the best that Sheffield could turn out.*

"My crowning triumph was the poem written for the occasion. I was afraid that after a grand one by our worthy croupier, † my short production would fall flat, but to my delight, almost every verse was cheered, and at the close of it the company rose *en masse* and drank my health. I then 'largely lived' the remainder of the night in a state of the most glorious enjoyment.

"I do not think there was another gathering in the 'three kingdoms' with half the enthusiasm in it. What else could be expected? Think of the roof under which we sat! It was an occasion truly worth the living for.

"I could say much more about this great night; but you must try and gather from the newspapers and this imperfect sketch together some faint glimmering of what the Centenary was within the 'auld clay biggin'."

The last poem in this collection, "Sailing up the Firth," was the last but one ("The Bapteesement o' the Bairn") that he wrote. It is the partial record of his last journey in the summer of 1868.

On the 10th May, 1869, he died, at the early age of 47, leaving a widow and five children to mourn the removal of the light of their home.

* A promise which was handsomely fulfilled.

† The late Mr. Robert Story, of Somerset House.

THE LADDIE'S LAMENTATION ON THE
LOSS O' HIS WHITTLE.

My Whittle's lost! Yet, I dinna ken;
Lat's ripe—lat's ripe my pouch again.
Na! I ha'e turn'd ower a' that's in'd,
But ne'er a Whittle can I find:—
A bit cauk, and a bit red keel—
The clamp I twisted aff my heel—
A bit auld shoe, to mak' a sling—
A peerie, and a peerie-string—
The big auld button that I faund
When crossin' through the fallow land—
A bit lead, and a pickle thrums—
And, last of a', some ait-cake crums.

Yet aye I turn them o'er and o'er,
Thinkin' I'd been mista'en before;
And aye my hand, wi' instinctive ettle,
Gangs to my pouch to seek my Whittle.

I doot it's lost!—how, whar, and whan,
Is mair than I can understan':—
Whether it jump out o' my pouch
That time I loupit ower the ditch,—
Or whether I didna tak' it up
When I cut a handle for my whup,—
Or put it in at the wrang slit,
And it fell through, doon at my fit.

But mony a gate I've been since then,
Ower hill and hallow, muir and fen,—
Outside, inside, but and ben:
I doot I'll never see'd again!

Made o' the very best o' metal,
I thocht richt muckle o' my Whittle!
It aye cam' in to be o' use,
Whether out-by or in the hoose,—
For slicin' neeps, or whangs o' cheese,
Or cuttin' out my name on trees;
To whyte a stick, or cut a string,
To mak' windmills, or onything.—
Wi' it, I was richt whare'er I gaed,
And a' was wrang when I didna hae'd.
I ken na how I'll do without it;
And, faith, I'm mighty ill about it!
I micht as weel live wantin' vittle
As try to live without my Whittle.

Yon birkies scamperin' doon the road—
I'd like to join the joysome crowd;
The very air rings wi' their daffin',
Their rollickin', hallooin', laughin'!
Flee on, my lads, I'll bide my lane;
My heart hings heavy as a stane;
My feet seem tied to ane-anither;
I'm clean dung doited a' thegither.
Hear, how they rant, and roar, and rattle!
Like me, they hinna lost a Whittle.

It was the only thing o' worth
That I could ca' my ain on earth:
And aft I wad admeerin' stand,
Haudin' the Whittle in my hand;
Breathin' upon its sheenin' blade,
To see how quick the breath wad fade;
And weel I kent it wad reveal
The blade to be o' richt guid steel.

Puir Whittle! whar will ye be now?
In wood? on lea? on hill? in howe?
Lyin' a' cover'd ower wi' grass?
Or sinkin' doon in some morass?
Or may ye be already fund,
And in some ither body's hand?
Or will ye lie till, ruisted o'er,
Ye look like dug-up dirks of yore?—
When we're a' dead, and sound eneuch,
Ye may be turn'd up by the pleuch!
Or fund i' the middle o' a peat,
And sent to Edinbruch in state!
There to be shown—a wond'rous sicht—
The Jocteleg o' Wallace Wicht!

Thus, a' the comfort I can bring
Frae thee, thou lost, lamented thing!
Is to believe that, on a board,
Wi' broken spear, and dirk, and sword,
And shield, and helm, and ancient kettle,
May some day lie my ruisty Whittle!