

**POEMS AND SONGS; WITH
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH
BY CHARLES ROGERS**

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Poems and Songs; With Biographical Sketch by Charles Rogers by James Currie

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BY

July 1873

JAMES CURRIE

LATE OF SEVENTY-NINTH CAMERON HIGHLANDERS

With Biographical Sketch

BY THE REV. CHARLES ROGERS, D.D., LL.D.

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Biographical Sketch.

BY THE REV. CHARLES ROGERS, D.D., LL.D.

“THE land of gallant hearts,” Scotland is the nursery of song. What natives of Caledonia lack in culture, or in the personal graces, is compensated to them in the love of melody. With a natural music the land is resonant. The breeze which rushes wildly on the uplands, sighs in the corrie, and in the vale breathes softly. The mountain which on its crest shelters the eagle, harbours at its base the merle and the thrush. Between the gentle ripple of the brook in its progress to the ocean, and the roar of the torrent on the mountain-side, there is an ever-varying cadence. It is meet that the inhabitants of a country of hill and dale, forest and meadow, should love melody and cherish it.

If culture is a denizen of the valley, the fire of independence first glowed upon the hill-top. Whether the race of primeval giants were hill-men, we know not; but it is certain that European civilisation, and that of Scotland in particular, came with those who migrated from the Ural Mountains. Dwellers in the uplands have ever combined a brilliant fancy with an ardent patriotism. Scottish valour was cradled among the mountains. The Romans planted themselves in Caledonia, but might not, by wall or war-chariot, maintain their hold. The English Norman kings could in the north strike terror, but might not enslave.

The consciousness that he belongs to an unconquered race has sustained the native of the north in every circumstance of trial. Even when thrust down and trampled upon, he summons up courage and regains his strength, remembering from whence he sprung. He who has been accustomed to hardship in his youth will not complain of roughness when he is old. The valorous who has no personal enemy to contend with, will seek to obtain mastery over himself.

These reflections have been suggested in contemplating the career of JAMES CURRIE. Born in 1829, at Selkirk, the capital of Ettrick Forest, his childhood was associated with scenes famous in story, and with events chronicled in ballad. Within a few miles of his birth-spot was Abbotsford, the home of that illustrious minstrel who revived old times in imperishable story; also Altrive, where James Hogg sung the simple joys of the hill-side. But CURRIE's immediate surroundings were not suited any more than were Chatterton's to the development of genius. His loving grandparents tended and sheltered him in his early years. His grandfather was parish sexton, and a believer in spectres, which, he held, wandered at night in solitary places, especially in the kirk-yard. Familiar with eerie tales, young CURRIE might have led his muse into fairyland, but that a sweet maiden smiled upon his boyhood, and lovingly enchanted him. After being a short time at school, he in his ninth year entered a woollen factory. Here he worked eleven hours daily, young as he was. To one of a poetic temperament, such toil was overwhelming: his youth was without sunshine. He began to despair, and, enlisting as a soldier, escaped from labours which more than crushed him. In the 79th regiment, associated with the memory of Richard Cameron and the struggle for liberty, civil and religious, he was at home.

With the Cameron Highlanders, he was sent to the Crimea. When the first expedition was ordered to Kertch, the 79th was unable to proceed, as it had been decimated by choleraic ailments. CURRIE, who kept well, was one of those appointed to wait upon

the sick, which he did with a fearless ardour and unshrinking courage. During the subsequent campaign, he was, notwithstanding the privations and hardships of the terrible winter, daily at his post. At length came the great storming. CURRIE took part in the struggle, and fought desperately. On the 8th September, 1855, almost in the hour of victory, he was smitten down with the loss of his right arm. On his recovery he was discharged, and compensated for the loss of his arm with a pension of one shilling per day.

Returning to Selkirk, he became post-runner to Yair. During the six years he held this office, he secured many friends, and gained general respect. He occupied his evening hours in writing for the Border journals, both in prose and verse. Obtaining employment in the establishment of Messrs Cochrane, millowners, Galashiels, he removed thither, afterwards to the village of Darnick in the vicinity. After twelve years, his services were, without cause assigned, dispensed with summarily. He now resides at Motherwell, in the Vale of Clyde.

Steady, sober, and industrious, JAMES CURRIE is an intelligent companion, an obliging neighbour, and more than a credit to the humble race from which he springs. Amidst provocation, he has forborne retaliation; amidst hardship, he has prudently kept silence. At one period he joined in the cup of mirth, and sought it too freely; this is of the long past. He is a consistent abstainer from alcoholic stimulants; and singing of freedom, he is himself free. He is married: the girl of his heart, who anxiously prayed for his preservation during his Crimean struggles, became at the close his wedded wife. Their children—a son and two daughters—are settled and married, and all of them hold their poet-sire in much affection.

Hitherto we have not referred to CURRIE'S capabilities as a poet. To any lofty genius he does not pretend. He has invoked the muse as a solace, and published verses in the hope that words and thoughts which have cheered himself may interest and

comfort others. His numbers are, like his themes, unambitious. Loving his country and his kindred, he has celebrated the one and lovingly depicted the other. His joys being of the home, he has sung of them. Like other Scottish bards, he has portrayed the charms of rural life, and, celebrating the cottage, has depicted the beauty of cottage maidens. Personally benevolent, he has praised the generous; himself upright, he has unveiled pretence and scourged it. His verses are not always smooth, yet in their ruggedness are bound up individuality and strength. His simplest numbers never lack tenderness or force. A son of the Forest, he sustains not unworthily the skill and rhythm of its elder minstrels. His former volume, "Wayside Musings," which appeared in 1863, proved acceptable to his neighbours, and the subscription-list which has brought the present volume into existence is a large one. JAMES CURRIE is one of a number, in Scotland not rare, whose intelligence is less due to scholastic training than to strong intellectual vigour, intensified by reflection and strengthened by diligence.



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