

**THE POEMS OF  
JAMES HOGG, THE  
ETTRICK SHEPHERD**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649674558

The Poems of James Hogg, the Ettrick Shepherd by James Hogg & William Wallace

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**JAMES HOGG & WILLIAM WALLACE**

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JAMES HOGG

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THE POEMS OF  
JAMES HOGG

THE ETRICK SHEPHERD

SELECTED AND EDITED WITH

AN INTRODUCTION

BY

WILLIAM WALLACE, LL.D.



LONDON  
ISBISTER AND COMPANY LIMITED  
15 TAVISTOCK STREET, COVENT GARDEN  
1903

## CONTENTS

*Frontispiece*—JAMES HOGG: From a Drawing in Water-Colours  
by S. P. Denning, in the National Portrait Gallery. Walker  
and Cockerell, photo., 15 Clifford's Inn, London, W.C.

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION . . . . .	I
 <b>THE QUEEN'S WAKE</b>	
Introduction . . . . .	13
<i>Night the First</i> . . . . .	31
Malcolm of Lorn . . . . .	32
Young Kennedy . . . . .	41
The Witch of Fife . . . . .	53
<i>Night the Second</i> . . . . .	72
Glen-Avin . . . . .	75
Old David . . . . .	83
The Fate of Macgregor . . . . .	102
Earl Walter . . . . .	107
Kilmeny . . . . .	120
<i>Night the Third</i> . . . . .	138
Mary Scott . . . . .	142
King Edward's Dream . . . . .	172

## CONTENTS

	PAGE
Dumlanrig . . . . .	179
The Abbot M'Kinnon . . . . .	198
Conclusion . . . . .	210

## OTHER POEMS

The Guid Grey Cat . . . . .	224
Lock the Door, Lariston . . . . .	239
M'Kimman . . . . .	242
Donald M'Donald . . . . .	244
Bonny Prince Charlie . . . . .	246
Flora Macdonald's Farewell . . . . .	248
M'Lean's Welcome . . . . .	250
The Hill of Lochiel . . . . .	251
Donald M'Gillavry . . . . .	253
Bauldy Frazer . . . . .	255
When the Kye comes Hame . . . . .	257
The Skylark . . . . .	260
The Minstrel Boy . . . . .	261
The Last Cradle Song . . . . .	261
Come Rowe the Boat . . . . .	262
Love is like a Dizziness . . . . .	263
I'll no wake wi' Annie . . . . .	265
The Auld Man's Fareweel to his wee House	267
I Hae Naebody Now . . . . .	269
The Village of Balmaquhapple . . . . .	271



## INTRODUCTION

THE personality of James Hogg, the Ettrick Shepherd, is one of the most likable in Scottish literature; and that may be said even more truly of the Hogg of history than of the Hogg of fantasy, to use Professor Ferrier's phrase, who is enshrined in the "Noctes Ambrosianæ." These are two quite distinct personalities, for the real Hogg was not voluble in conversation, but could only emit an occasional quaint or poetical flash; he was convivial, but not a gourmand; he was simply an untaught shepherd, endowed with poetical genius, the proper issue of a race of pious, unaffected, superstitious country folk, a noble specimen in physique and *moral* of the peasantry of Scotland, capable of bearing adversity with indomitable cheerfulness, a true singer, and unequalled in any literature, at least in the poetic realisation of fairyland. The word Border poetry calls up inevitably in the mind not only the ballads collected and imitated by Scott—who, by the way, drew from the memory's store of, among others, Hogg's mother—not only Lady Grisell Baillie, Jane Elliot of Minto, and Mrs. Cockburn; but preeminently James Hogg, who was the first to be consciously inspired by

the characteristic Border scenery of round green hills, lonely glens, and clear rushing streams, who made Yarrow, Ettrick and St. Mary's Loch into poetical symbols, and has drawn to the country innumerable pilgrims of sentiment from Wordsworth down.

Hogg was born at the end of 1770, in a cottage on the bank of the Ettrick, Selkirkshire; the exact date of his birth is uncertain. The name Hogg is a corruption of the Scandinavian Haig, still preserved by the ancient family of Bemersyde. His father, Robert, was descended from a line of Border shepherds, and, like his son after him, saved money enough to stock a sheep farm, only to involve himself in difficulties and descend to his original rank a few years after James's birth, when the poet's short school life of some six months in all came to an end.

At seven Hogg was a cowherd barely knowing how to write, and able with pains only to read the Bible; but doubtless well stocked with the ballads and legendary lore of Ettrick Forest (Selkirkshire), of which his mother was a repository. In the naive and self-complacent "Memoirs of the Author's Life," he retails the recollections of his hard life with a wealth of detail; how, though it would "scarcely be believed," he loved a rosy-cheeked maiden at eight, served a dozen masters before he was fifteen, and never served one without getting a verbal recommendation to the next, "especially for my inoffensive behaviour"; how he remembered "being particularly bare of shirts"; how he bought a violin when he was fourteen, and learned the Psalms of David by heart. His youth, receptive as it must have been to the influence of his environment, was plainly uninfluenced by literature in any shape save only Routh. He con-

fesses that he read "The Life and Adventures of Sir William Wallace" and "The Gentle Shepherd" in his eighteenth year without emotion or appreciation. But the farmer of Blackhouse (father of his and Scott's friend, William Laidlaw), whom the poet served for ten years from 1790, had a library, and on the hillside the shepherd read Milton, Pope and Thomson. His mind was stirred, and at last he began to write; but not till an incentive came from a more fortunate quarter.

A half-witted fellow met him on the hill one day, and repeated to him the whole of "Tam o' Shanter." Burns had just died. Hogg had never heard of him, and when the "natural" related the story of the farmer poet and singer, the shepherd's emulation was moved, and so his first painful essays in composition were lyric. Professor Veitch, himself a Border poet, has told once for all the genesis of Hogg's verse-making:—

"I like to picture Hogg at this period, as he herded on the Hawkshaw Rig, up the Douglas burn—a dark heathery slope of the Blackhouse Heights, which divide the Blackhope Burn from the other main feeders of the Douglas. There, on a summer day, during these ten years, you would find on the hill a ruddy-faced youth, of middle height, of finely symmetrical and agile form, with beaming light blue eyes, and a profusion of light brown hair that fell over his shoulders, long, fair, and lissome as a woman's. Now it was here in those long summer days, that extend from morn to gloamin', and amid similar scenes in Etrick and in Yarrow, that this simple, untaught, yet impassioned shepherd lad, with his heart full of the lore his mother and grey-haired men had taught him,