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LINES TO AGNES BAILLIE ON HER BIRTHDAY.

DEAR Agnes, gleamed with joy and dashed with
tears,

O'er us have glided almost sixty years

Since we on Bothwell's bonny braes were seen,

By those whose eyes long closed in death have
been,

Two tiny imps, who scarcely stooped to gather

The slender hair-bell on the purple heather;

No taller than the foxglove's spiky stem,

That dew of morning studs with silvery gem.

Then every butterfly that crossed our view

With joyful shout was greeted as it flew,

And moth and lady-bird and beetle bright

In sheeny gold were each a wondrous sight.

Then as we paddled barefoot, side by side,
 Among the sunny shallows of the Clyde,*
 Minnows or spotted paur with twinkling fin,
 Swimming in mazy rings the pool within,
 A thrill of gladness through our bosoms sent,
 Seen in the power of early wonderment.

A long perspective to my mind appears,
 Looking behind me to that line of years,
 And yet through every stage I still can trace
 Thy visioned form, from childhood's morning grace
 To woman's early bloom, changing how soon!
 To the expressive glow of woman's noon;
 And now to what thou art, in comely age,
 Active and ardent. Let what will engage
 Thy present moment, whether hopeful seeds
 In garden-plat thou sow, or noxious weeds
 From the fair flower remove, or ancient lore
 In chronicle or legend rare explore,

* The Manse of Bothwell was at some considerable distance from the Clyde, but the two little girls were sometimes sent there in summer to bathe and wade about.

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Or on the parlour hearth with kitten play,
Stroking its tabby sides, or take thy way
To gain with hasty steps some cottage door,
On helpful errand to the neighbouring poor,
Active and ardent, to my fancy's eye,
Thou still art young in spite of time gone by.
Though oft of patience brief and temper keen,
Well may it please me, in life's latter scene,
To think what now thou art and long to me hast been.

'Twas thou who woo'dst me first to look
Upon the page of printed book,
That thing by me abhorred, and with address
Didst win me from my thoughtless idleness,
When all too old become with bootless haste
In fitful sports the precious time to waste.
Thy love of tale and story was the stroke
At which my dormant fancy first awoke,
And ghosts and witches in my busy brain
Arose in sombre show, a motley train.
This new-found path attempting, proud was I,
Lurking approval on thy face to spy,

Or hear thee say, as grew thy roused attention,
 "What! is this story all thine own invention?"

Then, as advancing through this mortal span,
 Our intercourse with the mixed world began,
 Thy fairer face and sprightlier courtesies,
 (A truth that from my youthful vanity
 Lay not concealed) did for the sisters twain,
 Where'er we went, the greater favour gain;
 While, but for thee, vexed with its tossing tide,
 I from the busy world had shrunk aside.
 And now in later years, with better grace
 Thou helpst me still to hold a welcome place
 With those whom nearer neighbourhood have made
 The friendly cheerers of our evening shade.

With thee my humours, whether grave or gay,
 Or gracious or untoward, have their way.
 Silent if dull—O precious privilege!
 I sit by thee; or if, culled from the page
 Of some huge, ponderous tome which, but thyself,
 None e'er had taken from its dusty shelf,

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Thou read me curious passages to speed
The winter night, I take but little heed
And thankless say "I cannot listen now,"
'Tis no offence; albeit, much do I owe
To these, thy nightly offerings of affection,
Drawn from thy ready talent for selection;
For still it seemed in thee a natural gift
The lettered grain from lettered chaff to sift.

By daily use and circumstance endeared,
Things are of value now that once appeared
Of no account, and without notice past,
Which o'er dull life a simple cheering cast;
To hear thy morning steps the stair descending,
Thy voice with other sounds domestic blending;
After each stated nightly absence, met
To see thee by the morning table set,
Pouring from smoky spout the amber stream
Which sends from saucered cup its fragrant
steam;

To see thee cheerly on the threshold stand,
On summer morn, with trowel in thy hand

For garden-work prepared; in winter's gloom
 From thy cold noonday walk to see thee come,
 In furry garment lapt, with spattered feet
 And by the fire resume thy wonted seat;
 Aye even o'er things like these, soothed age has
 thrown

A sober charm they did not always own.
 As winter-hoar-frost makes minutest spray
 Of bush or hedge-weed sparkle to the day,
 In magnitude and beauty, which bereaved
 Of such investment, eye had ne'er perceived.

The change of good and evil to abide,
 As partners linked, long have we side by side
 Our earthly journey held, and who can say
 How near the end of our united way?
 By nature's course not distant; sad and 'reft
 Will she remain,—the lonely pilgrim left.
 If thou art taken first, who can to me
 Like sister, friend and home-companion be?
 Or who, of wonted daily kindness shorn,
 Shall feel such loss, or mourn as I shall mourn?

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ON HER BIRTHDAY.

225

And if I should be fated first to leave
This earthly house, though gentle friends may grieve,
And he above them all, so truly proved
A friend and brother, long and justly loved,
There is no living wight, of woman born,
Who then shall mourn for me as thou wilt mourn.

Thou ardent, liberal spirit! quickly feeling
The touch of sympathy and kindly dealing
With sorrow or distress, for ever sharing
The unhoarded mite, nor for to morrow caring,—
Accept, dear Agnes, on thy natal day,
An unadorned but not a careless lay.
Nor think this tribute to thy virtues paid
From tardy love proceeds, though long delayed.
Words of affection, howsoe'er expressed,
The latest spoken still are deemed the best:
Few are the measured rhymes I now may write;
These are, perhaps, the last I shall endite.