
GIVEN TO A LADY
WHO ASKED ME TO WRITE
A POEM.

IN royal Anna's golden days,
Hard was the task to gain the bays;
Hard was it then the hill to climb;
Some broke a neck, some lost a limb.
The vot'ries for poetic fame,
Got aff decrepit, blind, an' lame:
Except that little fellow Pope,
Few ever then got near its top:
An' Homer's crutches he may thank,
Or down the brae he'd got a clank.

Swift, Thomfon, Addifon, an' Young
Made Pindus echo to their tongue,

In hopes to please a learned age;
But Doctor Johnstou, in a rage,
Unto posterity did shew
Their blunders great, their beauties few,
But now he's dead, we weel may ken;
For ilka dunce maun hae a pen,
To write in hamely, uncouth rhymes;
An' yet forsooth they please the times.

A ploughman chiel, Rab Burns his name,
Pretends to write; an' thinks nae shame
To fouse his sonnets on the court;
An' what is strange, they praise him for't,
Even folks, wha're of the highest station,
Ca' him the glory of our nation.

But what is more surprising still,
A milkmaid must tak up her quill;
An' she will write, shame fa' the rabble!
That think to please wi' ilka bawble.
They may thank heav'n, auld Sam's asleep:
For could he ance but get a peep,
He, wi' a vengeance wad them sen'
A' headlong to the dunces' den.

Yet Burns, I'm tauld, can write wi' ease,
An' a' denominations please;
Can wi' uncommon glee impart
A usefu' lesson to the heart;
Can ilka latent thought expose,
An' Nature trace whare'er she goes:
Of politics can talk wi' skill,
Nor dare the critics blame his quill.

But then a rustic country quean
To write—was e'er the like o't seen?
A milk maid poem-books to print;
Mair fit she wad her dairy tent;
Or labour at her spinning wheel,
An' do her wark baith swift an' weel.
Frae that she may some profit share,
But winna frae her rhyming ware.
Does she, poor silly thing, pretend
The manners of our age to mend?
Mad as we are, we're wise enough
Still to despise sic paultry stuff.

“ May she wha writes, of wit get mair,
An’ a’ that read an ample share
Of candour ev’ry fault to screen,
That in her dogg’ral scrawls are seen.”

All this and more, a critic said ;
I heard and slunk behind the shade :
So much I dread their cruel spite,
My hand still trembles when I write. ~ ~