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## POEMS.

### A WINTER'S DAY.

THE cock warm roosting 'mid his feathered mates,  
 Now lifts his beak and snuffs the morning air,  
 Stretches his neck and claps his heavy wings,  
 Gives three hoarse crows, and glad his task is done,  
 Low chuckling turns himself upon the roost,  
 Then nestles down again into his place.  
 The labouring hind,\* who on his bed of straw  
 Beneath his home-made coverings, coarse but warm,  
 Locked in the kindly arms of her who spun them,

\* Hind does not perfectly express the condition of the person here intended, who is somewhat above a common labourer,—the tenant of a very small farm, which he cultivates with his own hands; a few cows, perhaps a horse, and some six or seven sheep, being all the wealth he possessed. A class of men very common in the west of Scotland, ere political economy was thought of.

Dreams of the gain that next year's crop should  
bring;

Or at some fair, disposing of his wool,  
Or by some lucky and unlooked-for bargain,  
Fills his skin purse with store of tempting gold,  
Now wakes from sleep at the unwelcome call,  
And finds himself but just the same poor man  
As when he went to rest.

He hears the blast against his window beat  
And wishes to himself he were a laird,  
That he might lie a-bed. It may not be:  
He rubs his eyes and stretches out his arms;  
Heigh ho! heigh ho! he drawls with gaping mouth,  
Then, most unwillingly creeps from his lair,  
And without looking-glass puts on his clothes.

With rueful face he blows the smothered fire,  
And lights his candle at the reddening coal;  
First sees that all be right among his cattle,  
Then hies him to the barn with heavy tread,  
Printing his footsteps on the new-fallen snow.  
From out the heaped-up mow he draws his sheaves,  
Dislodging the poor red-breast from his shelter

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Where all the live-long night he slept secure;  
But now, affrighted, with uncertain flight,  
Flutters round walls, and roof, to find some hole  
Through which he may escape.  
Then whirling o'er his head, the heavy flail  
Descends with force upon the jumping sheaves,  
While every rugged wall and neighbouring cot  
The noise re-echoes of his sturdy strokes.

The family cares call next upon the wife  
To quit her mean but comfortable bed.  
And first she stirs the fire and fans the flame,  
Then from her heap of sticks for winter stored  
An armful brings; loud crackling as they burn,  
Thick fly the red sparks upward to the roof,  
While slowly mounts the smoke in wreathy clouds.  
On goes the seething pot with morning cheer,  
For which some little wistful folk await,  
Who, peeping from the bed-clothes, spy well pleased,  
The cheery light that blazes on the wall,  
And bawl for leave to rise.  
Their busy mother knows not where to turn,

Her morning's work comes now so thick upon her.  
 One she must help to tie his little coat,  
 Unpin another's cap, or seek his shoe  
 Or hosen lost, confusion soon o'er-mastered!  
 When all is o'er, out to the door they run  
 With new-combed sleeky hair and glistening faces,  
 Each with some little project in his head.  
 His new-soled shoes one on the ice must try;  
 To view his well-set trap another hies,  
 In hopes to find some poor unwary bird,  
 (No worthless prize) entangled in his snare;  
 While one, less active, with round rosy cheeks,  
 Spreads out his purple fingers to the fire,  
 And peeps most wishfully into the pot.

But let us leave the warm and cheerful house  
 To view the bleak and dreary scene without,  
 And mark the dawning of a Winter day.  
 The morning vapour rests upon the heights  
 Lurid and red, while growing gradual shades  
 Of pale and sickly light spread o'er the sky.  
 Then slowly from behind the southern hills

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Enlarged and ruddy comes the rising sun,  
 Shooting askance the hoary waste his beams  
 That gild the brow of every ridgy bank,  
 And deepen every valley with a shade.  
 The crusted window of each scattered cot,  
 The icicles that fringe the thatched roof,  
 The new-swept slide upon the frozen pool,  
 All keenly glance, new kindled with his rays;  
 And even the rugged face of scowling Winter  
 Looks somewhat gay. But only for a time  
 He shews his glory to the brightening earth,  
 Then hides his face behind a sullen cloud.

The birds now quit their holes and lurking sheds,  
 Most mute and melancholy, where through night,  
 All nestling close to keep each other warm,  
 In downy sleep they had forgot their hardships;  
 But not to chant and carol in the air,  
 Or lightly swing upon some waving bough,  
 And merrily return each other's notes;  
 No; silently they hop from bush to bush,  
 Can find no seeds to stop their craving want,

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Then bend their flight to the low smoking cot,  
Chirp on the roof, or at the window peck,  
To tell their wants to those who lodge within.  
The poor lank hare flies homeward to his den,  
But little burthened with his nightly meal  
Of withered colworts from the farmer's garden;  
A wretched scanty portion, snatched in fear;  
And fearful creatures, forced abroad by hunger,  
Are now to every enemy a prey.

The husbandman lays by his heavy flail,  
And to the house returns, where for him wait  
His smoking breakfast and impatient children,  
Who, spoon in hand, and ready to begin,  
Toward the door cast many an eager look  
To see their Dad come in.  
Then round they sit, a cheerful company;  
All quickly set to work, and with heaped spoons  
From ear to ear besmear their rosy cheeks.  
The faithful dog stands by his master's side  
Wagging his tail and looking in his face;  
While humble puss pays court to all around,

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## A WINTER'S DAY.

And purs and rubs them with her furry sides,  
 Nor goes this little flattery unrewarded.  
 But the laborious sit not long at table;  
 The grateful father lifts his eyes to heaven  
 To bless his God, whose ever bounteous hand  
 Him and his little ones doth daily feed,  
 Then rises satisfied to work again.

The varied rousing sounds of industry  
 Are heard through all the village.  
 The humming wheel, the thrifty housewife's  
 tongue,  
 Who scolds to keep her maidens to their work,  
 The wool-card's grating most unmusical!  
 Issue from every house.  
 But hark! the sportsman from the neighbouring  
 hedge  
 His thunder sends! loud bark the village curs;  
 Up from her cards or wheel the maiden starts  
 And hastens to the door; the housewife chides,  
 Yet runs herself to look, in spite of thrift,  
 And all the little town is in a stir.

Strutting before, the cock leads forth his train,  
And chuckling near the barn-door 'mid the straw,  
Reminds the farmer of his morning's service.  
His grateful master throws a liberal handful;  
They flock about it, while the hungry sparrows,  
Perched on the roof, look down with envious  
    eye,  
Then, aiming well, amidst the feeders light,  
And seize upon the feast with greedy bill,  
Till angry partlets peck them off the field.  
But at a distance, on the leafless tree,  
All woe-begone, the lonely blackbird sits;  
The cold north wind ruffles his glossy feathers;  
Full oft he looks, but dare not make approach,  
Then turns his yellow beak to peck his side  
And claps his wings close to his sharpened  
    breast.

The wandering fowler from behind the hedge,  
Fastens his eye upon him, points his gun,  
And firing wantonly, as at a mark,  
Of life bereaves him in the cheerful spot  
That oft hath echoed to his summer's song.

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A WINTER'S DAY.

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The mid-day hour is near, the pent-up kine  
Are driven from their stalls to take the air.  
How stupidly they stare! and feel how strange!  
They open wide their smoking mouths to low,  
But scarcely can their feeble sound be heard,  
Then turn and lick themselves, and step by step,  
Move, dull and heavy, to their stalls again.

In scattered groups the little idle boys  
With purple fingers moulding in the snow  
Their icy ammunition, pant for war;  
And drawing up in opposite array,  
Send forth a mighty shower of well-aimed balls,  
Each tiny hero tries his growing strength,  
And burns to beat the foe-men off the field.  
Or on the well-worn ice in eager throngs,  
After short race, shoot rapidly along,  
Trip up each other's heels and on the surface  
With studded shoes draw many a chalky line.  
Untired and glowing with the healthful sport  
They cease not till the sun hath run his course  
And threatening clouds, slow rising from the north,

Spread leaden darkness o'er the face of heaven;  
Then by degrees they scatter to their homes,  
Some with a broken head or bloody nose,  
To claim their mother's pity, who most skilful!  
Cures all their troubles with a bit of bread.

The night comes on apace—  
Chill blows the blast and drives the snow in wreaths;  
Now every creature looks around for shelter,  
And whether man or beast, all move alike  
Towards their homes, and happy they who have  
A house to skreen them from the piercing cold!  
Lo, o'er the frost a reverend form advances!  
His hair white as the snow on which he treads,  
His forehead marked with many a care-worn furrow,  
Whose feeble body bending o'er a staff,  
Shews still that once it was the seat of strength,  
Though now it shakes like some old ruined tower.  
Clothed indeed, but not disgraced with rags,  
He still maintains that decent dignity  
Which well becomes those who have served their  
country.

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With tottering steps he gains the cottage door:  
The wife within, who hears his hollow cough,  
And pattering of his stick upon the threshold,  
Sends out her little boy to see who's there.  
The child looks up to mark the stranger's face,  
And, seeing it enlightened with a smile,  
Holds out his tiny hand to lead him in.  
Round from her work, the mother turns her head,  
And views them, not ill pleased.  
The stranger whines not with a piteous tale,  
But only asks a little to relieve  
A poor old soldier's wants.  
The gentle matron brings the ready chair  
And bids him sit to rest his weary limbs,  
And warm himself before her blazing fire.  
The children full of curiosity,  
Flock round, and with their fingers in their mouths  
Stand staring at him, while the stranger, pleased,  
Takes up the youngest urchin on his knee.  
Proud of its seat, it wags its little feet,  
And prates and laughs and plays with his white locks.  
But soon a change comes o'er the soldier's face;

His thoughtful mind is turned on other days,  
 When his own boys were wont to play around him,  
 Who now lie distant from their native land  
 In honourable but untimely graves:  
 He feels how helpless and forlorn he is,  
 And big, round tears course down his withered  
 cheeks.

His toilsome daily labour at an end,  
 In comes the wearied master of the house,  
 And marks with satisfaction his old guest,  
 In the chief seat, with all the children round him.  
 His honest heart is filled with manly kindness,  
 He bids him stay and share their homely meal,  
 And take with them his quarters for the night.  
 The aged wanderer thankfully accepts,  
 And by the simple hospitable board,  
 Forgets the by-past hardships of the day.

When all are satisfied, about the fire  
 They draw their seats and form a cheerful ring.  
 The thrifty house-wife turns her spinning wheel;  
 The husband, useful even in his hour

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Of ease and rest, a stocking knits, belike,  
 Or plaits stored rushes, which with after skill  
 Into a basket formed may do good service,  
 With eggs or butter filled at fair or market.

Some idle neighbours now come dropping in,  
 Draw round their chairs and widen out the circle;  
 And every one in his own native way,  
 Does what he can to cheer the social group.  
 Each tells some little story of himself,  
 That constant subject upon which mankind  
 Whether in court or country, love to dwell.  
 How, at a fair, he saved a simple clown  
 From being tricked in buying of a cow;  
 Or laid a bet on his own horse's head  
 Against his neighbour's bought at twice his price,  
 Which failed not to repay his better skill;  
 Or on a harvest day bound in an hour  
 More sheaves of corn than any of his fellows,  
 Though e'er so stark, could do in twice the time;  
 Or won the bridal race with savoury bruise  
 And first kiss of the bonny bride, though all

The fleetest youngsters of the parish strove

In rivalry against him.

But chiefly the good man, by his own fire,

Hath privilege of being listened to,

Nor dare a little prattling tongue presume

Though but in play, to break upon his story.

The children sit and listen with the rest ;

And should the youngest raise its lispings voice,

The careful mother, ever on the watch,

And ever pleased with what her husband says,

Gives it a gentle tap upon the fingers,

Or stops its ill-timed prattle with a kiss.

The soldier next, but not unasked, begins

His tale of war and blood. They gaze upon him,

And almost weep to see the man so poor

So bent and feeble, helpless and forlorn,

Who has undaunted stood the battle's brunt

While roaring cannons shook the quaking earth,

And bullets hissed round his defenceless head.

Thus passes quickly on the evening hour,

Till sober folks must needs retire to rest,

Then all break up, and, by their several paths,

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Hie homeward, with the evening pastime cheered  
 Far more, belike, than those who issue forth  
 From city theatre's gay scenic show,  
 Or crowded ball-room's splendid moving maze.  
 But where the song and story, joke and gibe  
 So lately circled, what a solemn change  
 In little time takes place!

The sound of psalms, by mingled voices raised  
 Of young and old, upon the night-air borne,  
 Haply to some benighted traveller,  
 Or the late parted neighbours on their way,  
 A pleasing notice gives that, those whose sires  
 In former days on the bare mountain's side,  
 In deserts, heaths, and caverns, praise and prayer,  
 At peril of their lives, in their own form  
 Of covenanted worship offered up,  
 In peace and safety in their own quiet home  
 Are—(as in quaint and modest phrase is termed)  
 Are now engaged in *evening exercise*. \*

\* In the first edition of the *Winter Day*, nothing regarding family worship was mentioned: a great omission, for which I justly take shame to myself. "The Evening exercise," as it was

But long accustomed to observe the weather,  
 The farmer cannot lay him down in peace  
 Till he has looked to mark what bodes the night.  
 He lifts the latch, and moves the heavy door,  
 Sees wreaths of snow heaped up on every side,  
 And black and dismal all above his head.  
 Anon the norther blast begins to rise,  
 He hears its hollow growling from afar,  
 Which, gathering strength, rolls on with doubled  
 might  
 And raves and bellows o'er his head. The trees  
 Like pithless saplings bend. He shuts his door  
 And, thankful for the roof that covers him,  
 Hies him to bed.

---

called, prevailed in every house over the simple country parts of  
 the West of Scotland; and I have often heard the sound of it  
 passing through the twilight air, in returning from a late walk.

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 Drawn wide  
 Wear faintly  
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 But dimly tw  
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 The fitful ligh  
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