

William E. Aytoun (1813-65)

1 *The Burial-March of Dundee*

I.

Sound the fife, and cry the slogan —
 Let the pibroch shake the air
With its wild triumphal music,
 Worthy of the freight we bear.
Let the ancient hills of Scotland 5
 Hear once more the battle-song
Swell within their glens and valleys
 As the clansmen march along!
Never from the field of combat,
 Never from the deadly fray, 10
Was a nobler trophy carried
 Than we bring with us to-day —
Never, since the valiant Douglas
 On his dauntless bosom bore
Good King Robert's heart — the priceless — 15
 To our dear Redeemer's shore!
Lo! we bring with us the hero —
 Lo! we bring the conquering Græme,
Crowned as best beseems a victor
 From the altar of his fame; 20
Fresh and bleeding from the battle
 Whence his spirit took its flight,
'Midst the crashing charge of squadrons,
 And the thunder of the fight!
Strike, I say, the notes of triumph, 25
 As we march o'er moor and lea!
Is there any here will venture
 To bewail our dead Dundee?
Let the widows of the traitors
 Weep until their eyes are dim! 30

Wail ye may full well for Scotland —
Let none dare to mourn for him!
See! above his glorious body
Lies the royal banner's fold —
See! his valiant blood is mingled — 35
With its crimson and its gold —
See how calm he looks, and stately,
Like a warrior on his shield,
Waiting till the flush of morning
Breaks along the battle-field! 40
See — Oh never more, my comrades,
Shall we see that falcon eye
Redden with its inward lightning,
As the hour of fight drew nigh!
Never shall we hear the voice that, 45
Clearer than the trumpet's call,
Bade us strike for King and Country,
Bade us win the field, or fall!

II.

On the heights of Killiecrankie
Yester-morn our army lay: 50
Slowly rose the mist in columns
From the river's broken way;
Hoarsely roared the swollen torrent,
And the Pass was wrapt in gloom,
When the clansmen rose together 55
From their lair amidst the broom.
Then we belted on our tartans,
And our bonnets down we drew,
And we felt our broadswords' edges,
And we proved them to be true; 60
And we prayed the prayer of soldiers,
And we cried the gathering-cry,
And we clasped the hands of kinsmen
And we swore to do or die!
Then our leader rode before us 65

On his war-horse black as night —
Well the Cameronian rebels
Knew that charger in the fight! —
And a cry of exultation
From the bearded warriors rose; 70
For we loved the house of Claver'se,
And we thought of good Montrose.
But he raised his hand for silence —
“Soldiers! I have sworn a vow:
Ere the evening star shall glisten 75
On Schehallion's lofty brow,
Either we shall rest in triumph,
Or another of the Græmes
Shall have died in battle-harness
For his Country and King James! 80
Think upon the Royal Martyr —
Think of what his race endure —
Think of him whom butchers murdered
On the field of Magus Muir: —
By his sacred blood I charge ye, 85
By the ruined hearth and shrine —
By the blighted hopes of Scotland,
By your injuries and mine —
Strike this day as if the anvil
Lay beneath your blows the while, 90
Be they covenanting traitors,
Or the brood of false Argyle!
Strike! and drive the trembling rebels
Backwards o'er the stormy Forth;
Let them tell their pale Convention 95
How they fared within the North.
Let them tell that Highland honour
Is not to be bought nor sold,
That we scorn their prince's anger
As we loathe his foreign gold. 100
Strike! and when the fight is over,
If ye look in vain for me,

Where the dead are lying thickest,
Search for him that was Dundee!"

III.

Loudly then the hills re-echoed 105
With our answer to his call,
But a deeper echo sounded
In the bosoms of us all.
For the lands of wide Breadalbane,
Not a man who heard him speak 110
Would that day have left the battle.
Burning eye and flushing cheek
Told the clansmen's fierce emotion,
And they harder drew their breath;
For their souls were strong within them, 115
Stronger than the grasp of death.
Soon we heard a challenge-trumpet
Sounding in the Pass below,
And the distant tramp of horses,
And the voices of the foe: 120
Down we crouched amid the bracken,
Till the Lowland ranks drew near,
Panting like the hounds in summer,
When they scent the stately deer.
From the dark defile emerging, 125
Next we saw the squadrons come,
Leslie's foot and Leven's troopers
Marching to the tuck of drum,
Through the scattered wood of birches,
O'er the broken ground and heath, 130
Wound the long battalion slowly
Till they gained the plain beneath;
Then we bounded from our covert. —
Judge how looked the Saxons then,
When they saw the rugged mountain 135
Start to life with armèd men!
Like a tempest down the ridges

Open wide the hallowed portals
 To receive another guest!
Last of Scots, and last of freemen —
 Last of all that dauntless race,
Who would rather die unsullied 175
 Than outlive the land's disgrace!
O thou lion-hearted warrior!
 Reck not of the after-time:
Honour may be deemed dishonour,
 Loyalty be called a crime. 180
Sleep in peace with kindred ashes
 Of the noble and the true,
Hands that never failed their country,
 Hearts that never baseness knew.
Sleep! — and till the latest trumpet 185
 Wakes the dead from earth and sea,
Scotland shall not boast a braver
 Chieftain than our own Dundee!

1849

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