

Robert Burns (1759-96)

1 *The Battle of Sheriff-Muir*

Between the Duke of Argyle and the Earl of Mar.

Tune — “The Cameronian rant.”

[An old song, abridged and improved by Burns.]

“Oh cam’ ye here the fight to shun,
Or herd the sheep wi’ me, man?
Or were you at the Sherra-muir,
An’ did the battle see, man?”
“I saw the battle, sair an’ tough, 5
An reekin’ red ran mony a sheugh,
My heart, for fear, gaed sough for sough,
To hear the thuds, an’ see the cluds,
O’ clans frae wuds, in tartan duds,
Wha glaum’d at kingdoms three, man. 10

“The red-coat lads, wi’ black cockades,
To meet them were na slaw, man;
They rush’d an’ push’d, an’ blude outgush’d,
An’ mony a bouk did fa’, man;
The great Argyle led on his files, 15
I wat they glanc’d for twenty miles:
They hack’d an’ hash’d, while broadswords clash’d,
An’ thro’ they dash’d, an’ hew’d an’ smash’d,
Till fey men died awa’, man.

“But had you seen the philabegs, 20
An’ skyrin’ tartan trews, man,
When in the teeth they dar’d our Whigs,
An’ covenant true blues, man;
In lines extended lang an’ large,
When bayonets opposed the targe, 25
An’ thousands hasten’d to the charge,
Wi’ Highland wrath they frae the sheath
Drew blades o’ death, till, out o’ breath,
They fled like frightened doos, man.”

“Oh, how de’il, Tam, can that be true? 30
 The chase gaed frae the north, man;
 I saw myself, they did pursue
 The horsemen back to Forth, man;
 An’ at Dumblane, in my ain sight,
 They took the brig wi’ a’ their might, 35
 An’ straught to Stirling wing’d their flight;
 But, cursed lot! the gates were shut;
 An’ mony a huntit poor red coat,
 For fear amaist did swarf, man!”

“My sister Kate cam’ up the gate 40
 Wi’ crowdie unto me, man;
 She swore she saw some rebels run
 Frae Perth unto Dundee, man:
 Their left-hand general had nae skill,
 The Angus lads had nae good-will 45
 That day their neibors’ blude to spill;
 For fear, by foes, that they should lose
 Their cogs o’ brose — all crying woes;
 An’ so it goes you see, man.

“They’ve lost some gallant gentlemen, 50
 Amang the Highland clans, man:
 I fear my Lord Panmure is slain,
 Or fallen in Whiggish hands, man:
 Now wad ye sing this double fight,
 Some fell for wrang an’ some for right; 55
 But mony bade the world gude-night;
 Then ye may tell how pell an’ mell,
 By red claymores, an’ muskets’ knell,
 Wi’ dying yell, the Tories fell,
 An’ Whigs to hell did flee, man.” 60

1788

(From *The Ballads and Songs of Robert Burns*. London, 1864)