





When on before them fast  
Flies the red lightning blast, 70  
Through the lit pines aghast  
Howls the deep thunder.

Stormy the pipers blew,  
Snow white the ribbons flew,  
Deeper the fury grew, 75  
Madder than Flodden,  
Piercing through heart and brain.  
Beating like tempest rain,  
Drove the red hurricane  
O'er dark Culloden. 80

We did all that mere steel could do,  
Against a Saxon crew,  
Arm'd with the fire that flew;  
Lightning to blast us,  
Swifter than eagles' wing, 85  
From the dark rocky spring,  
Where the wild foxgloves cling,  
Athol-men past us.

One line was swept away,  
Still to that fatal fray, 90  
Laughing like boy at play,  
Drove on Glengarry.  
Pistol in bloody hand,  
Target thrown on the sand,  
Macbane, with swinging brand, 95  
Did not long tarry.

Banked up with rows of dead,  
Calmly as on a bed,  
With his gashed forehead red,  
Sat Angus the piper. 100  
Knitted his brows, and pale  
As seaman who sees a sail  
Split in the sudden gale,  
Still growing riper.

When Keppock saw them fly, 105  
Tears filled his burning eye —  
“Sons of my tribe,” his cry,  
“Am I forsaken?”

Fast on the bayonets then,  
Hewed he down flag and men, 110  
Fierce as from rocky den,  
The wolf o’ertaken.

Athol and Cameron men,  
Children of Lake and Fen;  
Would we could see again 115  
“John of the Battles!”

O for the stormy plaids!  
O for the rush of blades,  
Where through the rocky glades  
Fast the stream prattles. 120

Round his old sire a son  
Threw his stabbed arm, the one  
With a blood torrent run,  
Shielding from danger,  
Praying to Jesus there 125  
To save his hoary hair,  
So he might anywhere  
Die with the stranger.

One by his chieftain knelt,  
Holding his girdled belt; 130  
I saw the hot tears melt,  
Shed on the dying.

Then with his broad claymore,  
Reeking and wet with gore,  
Slew he some three or four 135  
Of the fools flying.

As when the granite blocks,  
Stricken by lightning shocks,  
Breaks from the Lomond rocks:  
Riven asunder, 140  
Smoke down the gorge and pass,

Shivered like brittle glass,  
Sweeping down pines like grass  
    With a hoarse thunder.

Crimson like driven flame, 145  
On the red tartans came,  
What could their fury tame?  
    Not steel or iron.

Cutting a bloody lane —  
Red path for serf and thane — 150  
Strode the grey Allan Bane  
    Through thy environ.

Sullen some stand apart,  
I saw the tear-drops start,  
Wrung from the bleeding heart, 155  
    Mourning lost honour.

“Better go mad and weep —  
Better grave twelve foot deep —  
Better eternal sleep —  
    Than this dishonour.” 160

Waiting and baring breast,  
Gaze turned towards the west;  
On their sheathed arms they rest,  
    Eyes staring redly. 165  
Gnashing with rage their teeth,  
Sword in the sluggish sheath —  
Dead on the bloody heath,  
    Slain in the medley.

Wounded men crawl and die,  
Striking with glazing eye, 170  
Deadly their grasp and cry,  
    Stabbing the German.

Clasping the bayonets, they  
Strove to hew out a way,  
Leaping, like hounds at bay, 175  
    On the red vermin.

Old men with blooded hair,



Sea, sky, and mountain fill  
All minds with wonder.

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