William E. Aytoun (1813-65)

2 The Execution of Montrose

I.	
Come hither, Evan Cameron!	
Come, stand beside my knee —	
I hear the river roaring down	
Towards the wintry sea.	
There's shouting on the mountain-side	5
There's war within the blast —	
Old faces look upon me,	
Old forms go trooping past:	
I hear the pibroch wailing	
Amidst the din of fight,	10
And my dim spirit wakes again	
Upon the verge of night.	
II.	
'Twas I that led the Highland host	
Through wild Lochaber's snows,	
What time the plaided clans came down	15
To battle with Montrose.	10
I've told thee how the Southrons fell	
Beneath the broad claymore,	
And how we smote the Campbell clan	
By Inverlochy's shore.	20
I've told thee how we swept Dundee,	
And tamed the Lindsays' pride;	
But never have I told thee yet	
How the great Marquis died.	
TTT	
III. A traitor sold him to his foes;	0.5
O deed of deathless shame!	25
I charge thee, boy, if e'er thou meet	
With one of Assynt's name —	
Be it upon the mountain's side,	0.0
Or yet within the glen,	30

Stand he in martial gear alone, Or backed by armèd men — Face him, as thou wouldst face the man Who wronged thy sire's renown; Remember of what blood thou art, And strike the caitiff down!	35
IV. They brought him to the Wetengete	
They brought him to the Watergate, Hard bound with hempen span,	
As though they held a lion there,	
And not a fenceless man.	40
They set him high upon a cart —	
The hangman rode below —	
They drew his hands behind his back,	
And bared his noble brow.	
Then, as a hound is slipped from leash,	45
They cheered the common throng,	
And blew the note with yell and shout,	
And bade him pass along.	
V.	
It would have made a brave man's heart	
Grow sad and sick that day,	50
To watch the keen malignant eyes	
Bent down on that array.	
There stood the Whig west-country lords,	
In balcony and bow;	~ ~
There sat their gaunt and withered dames,	55
And their daughters all a-row. And every open window	
Was full as full might be	
With black-robed Covenanting carles,	
	60
That goodly sport to see!	60
	60
That goodly sport to see! VI. But when he came, though pale and wan,	60
That goodly sport to see! VI. But when he came, though pale and wan, He looked so great and high,	60
That goodly sport to see! VI. But when he came, though pale and wan, He looked so great and high, So noble was his manly front,	60
That goodly sport to see! VI. But when he came, though pale and wan, He looked so great and high,	60 65

And each man held his breath, For well they knew the hero's soul Was face to face with death. And then a mournful shudder Through all the people crept, And some that came to scoff at him Now turnd aside and wept.	70
VII.	
But onwards — always onwards,	
In silence and in gloom,	
The dreary pageant laboured,	75
Till it reached the house of doom.	
Then first a woman's voice was heard	
In jeer and laughter loud,	
And an angry cry and a hiss arose	
From the heart of the tossing crowd:	80
Then as the Græme looked upwards,	
He saw the ugly smile	
Of him who sold his king for gold —	
The master-fiend Argyle!	
VIII.	
The Marquis gazed a moment,	85
And nothing did he say,	
But the cheek of Argyle grew ghastly pale,	
And he turned his eyes away.	
The painted harlot by his side,	
She shook through every limb,	90
For a roar like thunder swept the street,	
And hands were clenched at him;	
And a Saxon soldier cried aloud,	
"Back, coward, from thy place!	
For seven long years thou hast not dared	95
To look him in the face."	
IX.	
Had I been there with sword in hand,	
And fifty Camerons by,	
That day through high Dunedin's streets	
Had pealed the slogan-cry.	100

Not all their troops of trampling horse, Nor might of mailèd men — Not all the rebels in the south Had borne us backwards then! Once more his foot on Highland heath Had trod as free as air, Or I, and all who bore my name, Been laid around him there!	105
X.	
It might not be. They placed him next	
Within the solemn hall,	110
Where once the Scottish kings were throned	
Amidst their nobles all.	
But there was dust of vulgar feet	
On that polluted floor, And perjured traitors filled the place	115
Where good men sate before.	110
With savage glee came Warristoun	
To read the murderous doom;	
And then uprose the great Montrose	
In the middle of the room.	120
XI.	
"Now, by my faith as belted knight,	
And by the name I bear,	
And by the bright Saint Andrew's cross That waves above us there —	
Yea, by a greater, mightier oath —	125
And oh, that such should be! —	120
By that dark stream of royal blood	
That lies 'twixt you and me —	
I have not sought in battle-field	
A wreath of such renown,	130
Nor dared I hope on my dying day	
To win the martyr's crown!	
XII.	
"There is a chamber far away	
Where sleep the good and brave,	
But a better place ye have named for me	135

Than by my father's grave. For truth and right, 'gainst treason's might, This hand hath always striven, And ye raise it up for a witness still In the eye of earth and heaven. Then nail my head on yonder tower — Give every town a limb — And God who made shall gather them: I go from you to Him!"	140
XIII.	
The morning dawned full darkly,	145
The rain came flashing down,	113
And the jagged streak of the levin-bolt	
Lit up the gloomy town:	
The thunder crashed across the heaven,	
The fatal hour was come;	150
Yet aye broke in with muffled beat,	
The 'larm of the drum.	
There was madness on the earth below	
And anger in the sky,	
And young and old, and rich and poor,	155
Came forth to see him die.	
XIV.	
Ah, God! that ghastly gibbet!	
How dismal 'tis to see	
The great tall spectral skeleton,	
The ladder and the tree!	160
Hark! hark! it is the clash of arms —	
The bells begin to toll —	
"He is coming! he is coming!	
God's mercy on his soul!"	
One last long peal of thunder —	165
The clouds are cleared away,	
And the glorious sun once more looks down	
Amidst the dazzling day.	
XV.	
"He is coming! he is coming!"	
Like a bridegroom from his room,	170

Came the hero from his prison	
To the scaffold and the doom.	
There was glory on his forehead,	
There was lustre in his eye,	
And he never walked to battle	175
More proudly than to die:	
There was colour in his visage,	
Though the cheeks of all were wan,	
And they marvelled as they saw him pass,	
That great and goodly man!	180
XVI.	
He mounted up the scaffold,	
And he turned him to the crowd;	
But they dared not trust the people,	
So he might not speak aloud.	
But he looked upon the heavens,	185
And they were clear and blue,	
And in the liquid ether	
The eye of God shone through!	
Yet a black and murky battlement	
Lay resting on the hill,	190
As though the thunder slept within —	
All else was calm and still.	
XVII.	
The grim Geneva ministers	
With anxious scowl drew near,	
As you have seen the ravens flock	195
Around the dying deer.	
He would not deign them word nor sign,	
But alone he bent the knee;	
And veiled his face for Christ's dear grace	
Beneath the gallows-tree.	200
Then radiant and serene he rose,	
And cast his cloak away:	
For he had ta'en his latest look	
Of earth and sun and day.	
XVIII.	

Like a glory round the shriven,

And he climbed the lofty ladder

As it were the path to heaven.

Then came a flash from out the cloud,

And a stunning thunder-roll;

And no man dared to look aloft,

For fear was on every soul.

There was another heavy sound,

A hush and then a groan;

And darkness swept across the sky—

The work of death was done!

1844

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