



THE DAFT DAYS

Now mirk December's dowie face
Glowers owre the rigs wi' sour grimace,
While, through his *minimum* o' space,
 The bleer-ee'd sun,
Wi' blinkin light and stealin' pace,
 His race doth run.

Frae naked groves nae birdie sings;
To shepherd's pipe nae hillock rings;
The breeze nae odorous flavour brings
 Frae Borean cave;
And dwynin' Nature droops her wings,
 Wi' visage grave.

Mankind but scanty pleasure glean
Frae snawy hill or barren plain,
When winter, 'midst his nippin' train,
 Wi' frozen spear,
Sends drift owre a' his bleak domain,
 And guides the weir.

Auld Reekie! thou'art the canty hole,
A bield for mony a cauld rife sould,
Wha snugly at thine ingle loll,
 Baith warm an couth;
While round they gar the bicker roll,
 To weet their mouth.

When merry Yule-day comes, I trow,
You'll scantlins find a hungry mou;
Sma' are our cares, our stamacks fu'
 O' gusty gear,
And kickshaws, strangers to our view,
 Sin' fernyear.

Ye browster wives! now busk ye braw,
And fling your sorrows far awa';
Then, come and gie's the tither blaw,
 O' reaming ale,
Mair precious than the well o' Spa,
 Our hearts to heal.

Then, though at odds wi' a' the warl',
Amang oursels we'll never quarrel;
Though discord gie a cankar'd snarl,
 To spoil our glee,
As lang's there's pith into the barrel,
 We'll drink and gree.

Fiddlers! your pins in temper fix,
And rozet weel your fiddlesticks,
But banish vile Italian tricks
 Frae out your quorum;
Nor fortes wi' pianos mix –
 Gie's Tullochgorum.

For nought can cheer the heart sae weel,
As can a canty Highland reel;
It even vivifies the heel
 To skip and dance:
Lifeless is he wha canna feel
 Its influence.

Let mirth abound: let social cheer
Invest the dawnin' o' the year;
Let blithesome innocence appear,
 To crown our joy;
Nor envy, wi' sarcastic sneer,
 Our bliss destroy.

And thou, great god o' *aqua vitae*!
Wha sway'st the empire o' this city-
When fou, we're sometimes capernoity-
 Be thou prepar'd
To hedge us frae that black banditti,
 The City Guard.

NOTES

Fergusson spells many of his words in common with English, as was the case in Older Scots, so it is not always apparent to the modern reader – schooled only to read and pronounce English - as to how they should be pronounced in Scots. In Fergusson's day it was clear to people in Scotland how to pronounce them as they generally only heard these words in Scots.

OU, OW and U' spellings

These can be the cause of much confusion today. Most of these are pronounced with an 'oo' sound in Scots, as in the following used by Fergusson –

Abound, couth, crown, fou, fu', mouth, mou, now, our, oursels, sour, thou and trow.

So, for example, **couth, crown, mouth, now** and **trow** are pronounced with an 'oo' as **cooth, croon, mooth, noo** and **troo**.

Other spellings with an OW are pronounced as they look, with an 'ow' sound. In particular **browsters, dowie, glower** and **owre**.

GH spellings

Sometimes called the 'guttural' (from the French for 'throat') or 'fricative' (meaning a sound produced by friction) it can be easy to forget the Scots way of pronouncing these words. In Older Scots – and Scots today – it is usual to spell these words with a 'ch' (same sound as in 'loch') but in the 18th and 19th centuries many writers in Scots used the spelling 'gh' in common with English.

Note that Fergusson uses the spellings **Highland, light, and nought**. These were/are pronounced in Scots as **licht** and **nocht** with a sharp 'ch' as in the word loch. The word Highland was then pronounced **Heech-land**, but today is generally **Heelan**.

AW sound

A certain number of spellings used by Fergusson represent a long 'aw' sound such as **awa, blaw, braw, snaw, and Spa**.

VARIOUS

The Scots pronunciation of a number of words – which also appear in English – are indicated in the rhyming scheme as follows – quarrel with **warl'**, influence with **dance**, city with **vitae**, heal with **ale**, plain with **glean**.

For particular items of Scots vocabulary please refer to the standard reference work *The Concise Scots Dictionary* published by Scottish Language Dictionaries