

THE
OLD MAID AND WIDOW,
OR THE
WIDOW THE BEST WIFE;

BY
ALEXANDER BALFOUR.

I've set before you twa examples,
You maun allow, quite different samples
A withered MAIDEN—aye vexatious ;
A blithsome WIDOW—always gracious.

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OLD MAID AND WIDOW.

WIDOW THE BEST WITH

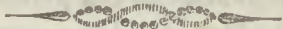
WIDOW THE BEST WITH

The old maid and the widow
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AN ADDRESS DELIVERED IN A DEBATING SOCIETY,
IN ANSWER TO THE QUESTION,
“ *Whether is it most prudent to marry an OLD MAID
or a WIDOW ?*”



Aye now the subject—kindly woman,
This night sets a’ our crowns a bummin’—
‘Its speered, I think, ‘ Were ane to venture
‘ For term o’ life, to sign indenture
‘ Whilk o’ the twa—AULD MAID or WIDOW,
‘ It were the wisest to be tied to?’

I own the question’s hard to answer,
But I sall do the best I can Sir :
Tho’ certes! Sir, I meikle doubt it,
The wisest here ken nought about it ;
That wisdom comes nae frae the College.
Experience only, gie’s the knowledge.

For tho' I mean to cast nae stigma,
I deem the question an enigma.

Now rhyme suits best to solve a riddle,
I've therefore, tried my rustic fiddle ;
An' if ye'll thole my hamely clatter,
Ye's get my mind about the matter ;
For tho' experience does na guide me.
I'll sing what I've observed beside me.

But tent me weel—although the story
That I intend to lay before ye,
Is true as Euclid's demonstrations,
Yet, as you mak' your observations,
Think for yoursel' as you proceed,
Nor let the Muse lay down your creed :
Observe my pictures as they pass ;
But censure not the general class
AULD MAIDS an' WIDOWS, I could name,
Whom envy's self could never blame ;
Whose grytest failings are good nature,
Wi' loveliness in ilka feature :
To minds like thae, endowed wi' sense,
My verse can never give offence.
And should some clarty, cankered wife,
Here find her likeness, drawn from life,
The fault is her's—to suit the picture ;
Not mine—who sketched the moral stricture.

I'd sooner scorn the Muses train,
 Than gi'e a sakeless bosom pain ;
 An' maist of a', wad I regard
 The cummers, dear to ilka bard.
 Love's dimplin' smile an' meltin', glance,
 Ha'e gart my heart wi' rapture dance ;
 An' lang as life that heart sall warm,
 Sae lang, I trust, sall woman charm.

Had a' the sex like pith to move,
 As first to win—then fix our love,
 The Muse had blythely spread her wing,
 And joyous, touched a safer string.
 Thae facts promised—lest patience fail,
 Good Mr. Preses, hear my tale.

In Rasy-glen there lived a chiel,
 Ane Watty Gibb, (I kent him weel,)
 A clean-houghed, weel-made, forthy callan,
 Wi' plenty laughin' round his dwallin' ;
 Twa sleekit naigs, four gude milk kye,
 Wi' calves an' stirks, an' cash forby ;
 His lease was lang, wi' canny rent ;
 Thus, set fu' cothie, an' content,
 He built a ha' of stane an' lime,
 Which few cou'd equal at the time ;
 The couples made of o'er-sea timmer,
 Had a' been seasoned thro' the simmer ;

A thick an' strong stob-thackit roof,
 That was baith wind an' water proof;
 A lum o' stane at ilka gavel;
 The causey tightly laid wi' gravel;
 Twa winnocks in the chaumer placed,
 Shewed Watty had baith wealth an' taste;
 The settin' sun-beams on them glancin',
 Set mony a cummer's heart a dancin';
 For a' thing seemed sae snug an' tight,
 'Twad be delight to keep them right.

But Watty was a lad fu' douse,
 An' thought wha best wad guide the house;
 Young giglets had sae much flirtation,
 He wished a wife wi' some discretion!

Kate Murdoch was a clever cummer,
 Wha now had seen her fortieth summer,
 Her hame frae Watty's no'twa stane-cast,
 Close by the road' where mony ane past:
 Kate-keekit aft at Watty's biggin,
 An' langed to live aneath its riggin.
 What could she do?—a maid sae modest!
 For Watty wad think her the oddest,
 The sairest changed, were she to speak him—
 But Katharine fand the way to cleek him.

For twenty years an' mair bygone,
 She'd wearied sair to lie alane;

Tho' mair than anes she'd got the glaiks,
 Frae flightered fools, or worthless rakes,
 She shawed a sober prudent carriage,
 An' still revered the state of marriage.
 What tho' the rose had left her cheek,
 Her hair was buskit up fu' sleek;
 Her weel plait mutch fu' deep was worn,
 To hod the scores upon her horn;
 She keekit daily in her glass,
 An' thought hersel' a spankin' lass.
 Syne mused on mony a wile, auld-farran',
 Into the warld to catch her errand.

In blinkin' days, when bees were bummin',
 This decent, sober, prudent woman,
 Bangs out her blankets—twenty pair,
 Hung round the dykes to get the air;
 Lang blads o' linen, wabs of harn,
 Enow to theekit Watty's barn.
 Twal pair o' sheets, an' sarks, a score,
 Lay bleachin', just afore the door.
 Kate had the knack to play her cartes,
 Tho' Watty dreamt na of her arts:
 She saw the lad come yont the gate,
 An' wow! she lookit mim and blate!
 As Watty passed, the sleekit hizzy,
 Was turnin' o'er her duds fu' bizzy,

Wi' unco bangs to shaw her mettle,
 Right feared that she wad miss her ettle.
 Up Watty comes—Now for her market—
 Quoth he, ' Troth Kate! ye're brawlie sarkit !'
 ' I'm weel eneugh—an' gude be thankit !'
 ' I neither want for bed nor blanket.'
 In short, ae clatter brought anither,
 Till Watty's heart begude to swither ;
 Neist gloamin', he ga'ed yont to see her,
 Sat by her hip, an' fyket wi' her ;
 Kate took him on the cheek a tirl,
 Poor Watty's heart—he fand it dirl ;
 He grippet Kate, ca'd her his jewel—
 She kent her time—an' was na eruel ;
 A lad like him! wha could affront him ?
 In twa three ouks she lay ayont him.
 A frugal wife's a precious gift,
 An' Watty's rib had wondrous thrift :
 Her weel plait much an' buskit hair,
 An' artfu' smile were seen nae mair,
 She had na time—for gatherin' gear.
 This pensy lass mith now be seen,
 In duds, an' dirt, frae morn to e'en ;
 Despisin' cauld, or wind, or weet,
 She skelpit on wi' naked feet ;

The ben-house, anes sae trig an' clean,
 Was now enough to ugg your een ;
 The winnocks dim wi' barked dust,
 The chimley ribs red o'er wi' rust,
 An' there, as fittest place for rest ;
 The hens sat clockin' in their nest,
 Meal-tubs, milk-cogs, an' kirns, were there ;
 Wi' claes an' clouts on ilka chair :
 The kitchen crammed wi' spinnin' wheels,
 Stools, water-tubs, an' washin' skeels,
 A' got a dreel, in Katharine's fizzes,
 The lasses banned for lazy hizzies ;
 She cursed the kye, for want o' ream,
 An' hens, because they laid frae hame :
 Poor Colley, wha to mony a fair.
 Wi' Watty troddled late an' ear',
 She bann'd him for a useless tyke,
 An' daddet him against the dyke.
 When Watty had come frae the pleugh,
 Sair tainghled, wi' the furs sae teugh,
 An' sought a drink, his drouth to slockin,
 She cou'd na lat her milk be broken ;
 But there was whey, was meikle better,
 Or if he chused, good caller water :
 Tho' her milk cogs stood lappered fu',
 She never wat a nibour's mou',

Was she to fling her wealth awa' ?
 Her pigs an' swine required it a' !
 Into the rip, the eggs mith rotten,
 For fint a shell wad Watty gotten ;
 Pease-scones, wi' smoke, an soot thick blacket,
 Kail-brose, an' 'tatoes i' their jacket,
 Wi' sowens, an' crowdie, thro' the simmer,
 Was Watty's stock o' belly timmer.

The bits o' hirdies, cauld an' weet,
 Near hand the fire durst never teet,
 'Sweer smatchets !—gae and had you warm,
 Out o'er a flail, into the barn !'

When Watty to a market gae'd,
 He boot to tell what trock he made ;
 How muckle meal came frae the miller,
 An' mak' account o' a' the siller.
 When he went to a borrows-town,
 If wi' a nibour he sat down,
 To crack, an' drink their stable fees,
 Kate stinted him to three baubees ;
 An' if she fand he'd been transgressin',
 Poor chiel ! he tholed a bonny lesson ;
 Although he'd sat the cutty-stool,
 Mass-John wad spared him hauf the dool.

The chapman, wi' his wallet trudgin',
 Wham Watty aft had gi'en a lodgin',

When first he camæ, the hail was driftin',
 An' sna'-ba's at his heels were liftin';
 Sair trachled—he was unko fain,
 Gin e'en to land at Rashy-glen;
 Waes me! he soon fand his mistak';
 Out thro' the floor she gart him pack;
 An' clashed the door close on his heels,
 While he went loiterin' o'er the fields,
 Ay givin' 's pack the tither hitch,
 An' cursin' Watty's cankered witch!

The beggars, wanderin' for their bit,
 Upon the green were fley'd to sit;
 The blind, the cripple, auld, an' young,
 Were fain to flee her rauckle tongue;
 She cursed them for a weirdless crew,
 Without an alms to dit their mou':
 An' ilka ane, as soon's they kent it,
 The Rashy-glen nae mair frequentit,

Now Watty ne'er was narrow-hearted,
 But wou'd to want a share imparted;
 When he saw Kate sae hard an' greedy,
 As scorn the blind, an' scauld the needy,
 The blush brunt warm upon his cheek,
 But that was a'—he durstna speak;
 Till what wi' ae thing an' anither,
 He tint his spirits a'thegither.

Their parish kirk was Buckie-den,
 Twa lang Scots miles frae Rasy-glen ;
 But ilka Sunday, foul, or fair,
 Winter, an' Simmer, Kate was there :
 Whan she came hame, she set to wark,
 Wi' mony a grave, an' sage remark ;
 Her tongue untiring, tald them a'
 Not what she heard, but what she saw :
 For neither widow, wife, nor maid,
 E'er changed a gown, or coft a plaid,
 But Kate could a' her wardrobe tell,
 An' kend the count, as weel's hersel'.
 Upo' the road, baith gawn, an' comin' ;
 She glegly tented man an' woman ;
 Tald wha took Mary o'er the stile,
 An' how she saw the giglet smile ;
 How widow Bell on Geordie blinked ;
 An' Susie to the miller winked ;
 While Matty's dochters, light, an' glaiket,
 In muslin duds, were maistly naked.
 Then she wad grieve, that silly pride
 Should lead fowk's hearts sae far aside,
 Or shaw themselves sae scant o' grace,
 As cast their airs in sic a place :
 Syne winding up her application,
 By weel-timed, warm vituperation ;

She closed the e'ning ilka Sunday,
In planning out the wark for Monday.

Kate had her spies o'er a' the parish,
Wha gathered news, her heart to cherish ;
An' ilka tale of village scandal,
She took it by the crooked handle ;
Her jaundiced e'e sought never mair
To mak' a tether than a hair ;
Reports, as facts were aye received,
An' rumour's slightest sound believed.
Keen, as a beagle snuffs the gale,
She scented out ilk wanton tale ;
Her lug was lent to gossip fame,
Aye fond to stain a sakeless name ;
Gleg as a gray-hound's, were her een,
'To mark what *faux pas* cou'd be seen :
Then, like new beer, in bottles pent,
The working scandal foamed for vent ;
Till from her tongue it hissing, past,
A noisy, frothing, empty blast.

I've heard it said—when supper's o'er,
Ill nature aft forgets to glow ;
An' Love, although but seldom seen,
Will meet wi' Man and Wife at e'en ;
A' pley's are hushed at hour o' beddin',
An' canker smooed aneath the plaiden ;

E'en this to Watty was denied—
Instead of aught by love supplied,
'Bout this an' that, she nightly grieved him,
An' wi' her curtain-lectures deaved him :
Syne, when her tongue to silence fley'd him,
Turned round her back, an' snored beside him.
An' when he waukened in the mornin',
Her first salute was jeers an' scornin' ;
Tho' Watty ill deserved sic mockin',
She jamphed him wi' the cradle rockin' ;
An' muckle mair he had nae wyte of,
The runkled carlin' took delight of.

She didna think that ane was douse,
Of a' her sex about the house ;
An' a' she kept of woman kind,
Were cripple, gley'd, or hassins blind ;
If Watty spake to ane or ither,
She gart him dree a waefu' dridder ;
At hay or har'st, she aye was seen
Close at his heels frae morn till e'en,
Till a' the cummers i' the clachan,
Were like to split their sides wi' laughin'.
If Watty looked at female kind,
It waukened tantrums in her mind ;
He cou'dna welcome in a stranger,
But Kate aye thought his heart in danger ;

The smile that manners claimed as civil,
Wou'd gart her greet—and played the d—l!

Such was the life that Watty led,
A jealous wife—an' childless bed!
An' to a friend, whom he cou'd trust,
'Mind this,' said he, 'when I'm in dust,
'Altho' she were wi' siller laden,
'O never marry an AULD MAIDEN!'

Now Mr. Preses, I've a fear,
That Katharine's wearied you fu' sair;
Be thankfu' Sir, she's not your wife,
An' think on Watty's waefu' life,
But if ye'll thole me for a little,
I'll fit your taste—I'll wad my whittle!

John Thomson lived in Gowan fau'd,
A stout, weel-biggit, simple lad;
Did little good—an' nought o' harm,
Wi' twa cows lab'ring of a farm:
When he sat down wi' fowk to crack,
He meant aye better than he spak';
E'en they wha thought him saft an' silly,
Ca'd him a kind, good-hearted billy.
He was na rich, but borrowed naething,
An' far frae pridefu' in his claithing;
His coat, tho' hale at kirk or fair—
Was seenil brushed—he didna care:

D' ye ken the cause?—he had nae wife,
 An' that's a waefu' want in life;
 Sair langed he for the married state,
 But cudna court, he was sae blate.

It happened anes in cauld December,
 A time he'd 'cassion to remember,
 Upon a journey he was gaun,
 When fierce the storm begude a blawin';
 Bauld Boreas raged o'er a' the lift,
 His throne thick clouds o' snawy drift,
 John set his bosom to the blast,
 Till gloamin' faded i' the wast:
 Nor house, nor hald could now be seen,
 Sma' pirlin' drift bedimm'd his een;
 Whiles stoitin' o'er a frosty know,
 Neist founderin' headlang in a how;
 Warslin' frae ae wreath to anither,
 John tint his farrach a' thegither.*
 But just when he on death was thinkin',
 Gleg in his e'e, a light came blinkin';
 He stendit now, wi' courage crouse,
 Persuaded he would find a house.
 Hope aft-times cheats the chiel wha trusts her,
 This night for anes, the quean was juster;

* Tam tint his reason a' thegither.—BURNS.

For John wi' ae five minutes travail,
Play'd rackabimus on the gavel ;
Felt for the door—when in advancin',
He saw a clear peat-ingle glancin' ;
While at her wheel, there sat fu' bizzie,
A rosy cheekit, sonsy hizzie ;
She bang'd out o'er, rax'd him a chair,
John hirpled down, an' leugh at care,
The ae-fau'd, open, honest heart,
Kens nought of affectation's art :
The noblest bliss benev'lence knows,
Is pœurin' balm on human woes ;
Such was the saul, inspired the form,
That welcom'd Johnny frae the storm.
Soft pity's smile, sae dear in women,
Was doubly sweet frae Mary Flemin' !
Her heart had kent baith joy and dool,
A scholar in misfortune's school ;
Ten years she'd been a married wife,
An' dream'd o' Willie's love for life ;
Death seized his prey in hapless hour,
An' sorrow saddened Mary's bower.
Five times the Spring had round her smiled,
Since fate her brightest hopes beguiled :
Slee Time of bliss, an' pain the thief,
By slow degrees, had banished grief ;

D An' now, a WIDOW, mild an' mæek,
 A₁ Fresh roses budded on her cheek;
 Sa A cheerfu' smile play'd round her mou';
 B₁ Twa twinklin' een o' bonny blue,
 Glanced on a bairnie by her side,
 A The pledge o' love—and Mary's pride:
 U₁ Such was the mistress o' the biggin',
 W₁ That sheltered John aneath its riggin':
 Ba The ingle bleezin'—hostess cheery,
 Hi Wi' bread an' cheese, he did na weary;
 Jo₁ But thought himsel' for anes sae right,
 Ti₁ He wish'd the storm to last a' night.
 No His wish was vain—the weather cleared;
 Sm Right laith to rise, he hameward steered;
 W₁ Crap to his bed—the lang night dreamin',
 Ne An' a' the subject Mary Fleemin'!
 Wa_a For aught lang days, he thought about her,
 Jo_h Syne fand he coudna live without her—
 Bu_t Gae'd back, an' tald his waefu' smart,
 Gle With offer, baith of hand and heart.
 He The WIDOW had a gentle nature,
 Per An' wadna wranged a livin' creature;
 Ho_r The mair she mused on Willie gane,
 Thi She fand hersel' the mair alane;

Without "a friend to tak' her part,"*
 Or banish sorrow frae her heart :
 She deemed, when measurin' Johnny's mind,
 Her bairn mith still a father find ;
 So had compassion on the lad,
 An' was gudewife o' Gowan fau'd !

A happy change there soon took place,
 John shawed mair smeddum in his face ;
 Looked younger like by ha'f a score,
 Than he had done for years before :
 On Sundays, i' the lang Kirk-loan,
 The fint a chiel' was drest like John,
 Fu' weel redd up, frae tap to tae,
 His very shoon as black's a slae.

Although their mailin' was but scanty,
 In warld's gear they grew fu' canty ;
 Love brought them twa three thumpin' childer,
 They baith grew rich in bairns an' silder.
 An' Mr. Preses, had you seen
 Their canty house, sae trig and clean ;
 The blithesome looks that love bestowed,
 The health on ilka cheek that glowed ;
 Your prayer wad been, (wi' heart fu' warm,)
 ' A WIDOW'S love, and rural farm !'

* Macniell.

J She studied aye her John to please,
 A By buskin snodly in her claes ;
 S For Mary kent, tho' hearts are won,
 I The task o' love is never done ;
 An' he wha has a sweetheart seen
 A Ay weel redd up, an' tight, an' clean,
 U Can hardly promise love for life,
 V If dirt, an' rags deface the wife.
 E She ne'er forgot, that love requires,
 F Mair skill to *beet*, than *light* his fires :
 J The fairest flower, the sweetest joy,
 I If still the same, are apt to cloy ;
 N The varied charm, the changing smile,
 S Can many a languid hour beguile ;
 V An' she, who wakes some infant grace,
 N Before unnoticed in her face,
 W May cold indifference still defy,
 J If some new glance light up her eye.
 B These simple truths—sae aft neglectit,
 G The prudent Mary aye respeckit ;
 H We've said, that John was far frae clever,
 P She saw his wants—but tauld him never ;
 H An' when she had advice to gi'e,
 T She brought it o'er sae saft, an' slee,
 John hardly kent, but thought her kind,
 For just complyin' wi' his mind.

In a' their quarrels for the breeks,
 The smile was dimplin' in her cheeks;
 Her gentle voice, an' melting e'e,
 Were sure to gar the lad agree;
 Thus, while she ca'd him lord an' master,
 A kiss knit a' his chains the faster!

About the haly days o' Yule,
 Ae night, her Johnny play'd the fool;
 Into the change-house, o'er a bicker,
 The lad took in his broe fu' sicker;
 He gaed to sell the humil cow,
 An' i' the bargain soon gat fou';
 Play'd at the cartes, till cocks were crawin',
 Syne stackered hame, about the dawin';
 The blood was driblin' o'er his chin,
 'Twa inch o' bark peeled aff his shin;
 His een, wi' glaur, an' gutters hod,
 His bonnet, tint upo' the road.
 Such is the won'drous pith o' maut;
 That mornin', a' thing was a fau't;
 Rampagin', thro' the house he jumpit,
 An' chairs an' stools on ither thumpit:
 She clappit him, wi' couthy smile,
 An' fleeched him up wi' mony a wile;
 Dight o'er his face—spread down the blanke
 An' him into her oxter clankit;

Sair sick he grew—an' white's a clout ;
 He thought the house ran round about !

Neist afternoon, John hang his head,
 While Mary smiled, an' little said ;
 Till John wi' her forbearance shamed,
 His fau'ts, and folly frankly blamed.
 ' O Mary, can your heart forgi'e me ?
 ' I wonder that ye thole to see me !
 ' Wae-worth that drink !—made me a beast—
 ' Insulted you—an' me disgraced !
 ' I sald the cow to Francie Miller,
 ' But to my shame—I've tint the siller !'
 ' Dear John, wi' keen repentance torn,
 ' Your bosom needs na ither thorn,
 ' I dinna count the siller lost—
 ' Ye've bought some wit—an' that's the cost ;
 ' Sae lat it gang, we'll never miss't,
 ' There's mair ahint into the kist !'

They crackit looves, an' measured mou's,
 New pleasure brightened Johnny's brows :
 Their stock increased, they took a farm,
 An' held a house baith snug and warm ;
 The poor fowk prayed to had them hale,
 For milk, an' bread, an' sowns, an' kail,
 Were never missed at meltit time,
 The back aft beetit wi the wame.

Thus mony a happy year row'd round,
 An' aye their love did mair abound :—
 Though Mary's cheek forgot to bloom,
 Good nature still kept beauty's room ;
 An' such this sweetest female grace,
 John kent nae change upon her face ;
 His heart was ne'er ae mament cauld,
 Nor did he think his Mary auld ;
 Except, when round the ingle side,
 He glanced at e'en, wi' manly pride,
 O'er lads an' lasses, ha'f a dizen,
 To men, an' women, round them risen,
 Ilk ane mair feckfu' than anither,
 The lov'lier, they were like their mither !

Love's langest day draws to an end—
 An' gloamin' came afore they kend :
 This happy pair, by death were parted,
 John dwined a wee, quite broken-hearted
 Forever fled that chearin' smile,
 Which ilka care cou'd soon beguile :
 At hame, he miss'd her e'en an' morn ;
 A-field, he dander'd quite forlorn ;
 Syne butt a langer wish to tarry,
 Sunk to the grave—beside his Mary !

Now Mr. Preses, butt a' banter,
 Consider this, as you 're a wanter :

I've set afore you, twa examples,
 You maun allow, quite different samples;
 A withered MAIDEN—aye vexatious;
 A blithsome WIDOW—always gracious:
 Sae when ye gang to wale a wife,
 Mind, that's a bargain lasts for life;
 If ye for tocher chuse your burdie,
 Tak' tent, an' think on Katharine Murdie.
 Be't MAID, or WIDOW, that ye fix on,
 I beg you shun a scauldin' vixen;
 If beauty tempt you—mind on Johnny,
 A pleasaunt wife is—always bonny!

FINIS