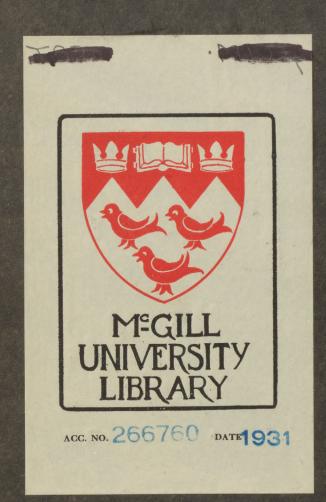
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Fowls O' the Air and other Verses in Scots

William P. McKenzie.

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The RYERSON POETRY CHAP-BOKS



Fowls o' the Air

And Other Verses in Scots
by
WILLIAM P. McKENZIE

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Mr. McKenzie has had several volumes of verse published. He attended Upper Canada College, and is a graduate of the University of Toronto: He was war correspondent for The Mail during the Riel Rebellion in 1885. After completing his course at Knox College, he took a post-graduate year at Auburn Seminary. Later he was instructor in English Literature and Rhetoric at the University of Rochester. In 1896 he began his continuing service with the Christian Science Publishing Society in Boston. His father came from Edinburgh to be minister of a parish in Ramsay, largely settled by Scottish people. Many of these songs recall memories of their way of speaking. Of books previously published, the Tribune Press, Cambridge, Massi, has issued this year Heartsease Hymns and The Sower in new editions.



Fowls o' the Air And Other Verses in Scots

By William P. McKenzie

FOWLS O' THE AIR

THE SMA' fowls i' the gress that rin,
Or flit tae the tapmaist twig o' the tree,
Hae a sun-bricht warl' tae flichter in,
An' for joy o' heart they mak' melodie.

They're bonnie wee things wi' bricht een— Ev'n the perky sparrows, o' nae account, Hae a pride o' life as they strut an' preen, Though twa for a farthin's the hale amount.

But Providence mak's o' the twain a guest; For them the sun maun be early up; For them trees grow tae shelter the nest, An' rains maun fa' tae fill their wee cup.

Why weary wi' thocht if Gude tak's care
O' a farthin's worth o' sparrow? Gif He
Tak's tent o' the needs o' the fowls o' the air
God's bairns mair nor they should mak' melodie.

One

SAND-GLASS

ON A frosty, frosty mornin',
When the cauld wad nip your taes,
The bairnies find the kitchen fine and warm;
When they are let tae do it
They carry doon their claes,
And Jean is there tae keep them oot o' harm.

They haud the parritch spurtle,
Aince they are dressed a' nice,
An' stir the parritch pluffin' i' the pat;
They look at maps o' countries
Jack Frost has drawn wi' ice
On window panes, till they are tired o' that.

But ae thing doesna tire them,
The hour-glass wi' red sand,—
'Twas frae Arabia, the Red Sea side,
And wha could prove it was na
Gaithered by an Arab band
Wi' horses white o' Solomon tae ride?

They cowpit it an' cowpit it
Tae watch the sand grains rin
For jist the time it tak's tae boil an egg;
Why ca' ye it an hour-glass
When it gaes oot sae sune?
That is the question for you Jean, said Meg.

The hour-glass was for sairmons
In the days o' ma youth, said she;
Fowk had tae get hame in time tae feed their stock;
For an hour-glass they'd wale a big ane,
An' place it for a' tae see,
For some o' the rantin' preachers wad mind nae clock.

Ae day wi' a' his faim'ly
Ma faither sat in his pew
And a button snecked the wee door at the en',
The minister was famous,
Aye, but he gart us rue
The preevilege o' hearin' famous men.

His argument grew looder,
He flung the hair back frae his croon,
He prophesied like an enraptured seer;
But aye the mair he thumpit
The sands were rinnin' doon,
I could see wi' joy the tap glass growin' clear.

At last the hour was ended,
And a rustle o' relief
Bestirred the fowk; I stretched mysel'; but then
I heard my faither whisper:
Anither hour! the thief!
As the minister cowpit the glass tae begin again.

ALEXANDER

HE WAS sic a wee bit fella, Unco serious forby; Ither lads sae teasin', tauntin', Aye wad follow him an' cry: Alexander the great commander Shot at a goose and killed the gander.

Heavy lay upon his spirit
A' this contumelious noise,
Wearily he speired his mither
Were there names for little boys?
Not Alexander wha killed the gander,
Not Alexander nor ony commander.

Faither an' mither were crouse an' couthie Fencin' the lad wi' tender care; Smilin' an' lauchin' they sure bethocht them O' jist a richt wey tae answer his prayer; Frae Alexander they found it handy Tae tak' the Alec, an' ca' him Sandy.

Noo ye have a respectable Sandy
Companion wi' ithers in every ploy,
Leader he is, mind ye that, a commander,
Named by a name that is fit for a boy.
Sandy it is, Sandy wi' dander,
A mair happy Sandy nor great Alexander.

HEID O' THE HOOSE

YOUNG lad, or auld lad, wha's built his hoose sae bonnily, Ye mauna tak' it serious gif ye think ye'll be the heid o't; A leddy's ways are various tae guide her guid-man cannily, Lay doon commandments, guid an' weel, ye'll find there is na need o't.

Ye'll be the ane commanded, lad, but this I can say verily,
Ye'll na ken hoo it comes aboot—your heart wull jist be
glad o't,

It's no a jack-o-lantern licht afore ye dancin' merrily—
Her wisdom's frae the licht o' love; tak' tent o' the gude tae
be had o't.

Ye'll see her at her verra best wi' bairns around her haverin'; At hame, like baith the sun and mune, their little warl' she brichtens;

She'll still the fechters, an' gie strength tae the wamblin' an' the waverin',

An' when her man comes hame at e'en his warl' o' care she lichtens.

ANNIE

HAE YE lost life, gentle Annie?
A' the years, are they gane tae waste?
Dinna think it, though fowk say it,
Ye hae gained life mair than maist.

I hae seen ye in your beauty;
I mind the lilting o' your tongue—
Mither spak' through ye, an' gran'mither,
Music o' Scots frae auld tae young.

Fowk o' your ain may be dead or mairrit, Gane may be freends o' auld lang syne, Ye hae been faithfu' in least as in meikle, Gude o' this life ye shallna tine.

Age wi' its frost oor hair may whiten,
Features be dulled wi' the dust o' time;
Mind is na aged, memory quickens,
Hearts fu' o' youth beat tae its rhyme.

Four

Bide ye in comfort, think o' the blessin'
Ye tae the lave o' your fowk hae been;
Is giein' o' life for ithers lossin'?
Dinna think it, 'twad be a sin.

Gie life, an' it comes back wi' mair and mair beauty, Scarce can ye haud it, the measure rins ower; Hate canna crine it nor auld age embitter; It is guidness itsel', wi' its glory and power.

* * * JEMMIE

IKE ane afore John Knox's hoose
Wha tirled at the pin,
Yet was afeart 'twad be nae use
Tae expect remede for sin,
An' he'd anely hear Gude's magistrate
Thunderin' aboot the law,—
Sae likewise Jemmie wasna blate
When he cam' tae the manse tae ca'.

He'd been into mischief frae a chiel,
Onything wad he dae for fun,
But the ower-guid ca'd him a limb o' the deil,
An' grudged him the licht o' the sun.
Ellen wha shauchled across the floor
Lifted the latch wi' a sniff,
But she took him ben tae the study door,
Walkin' woodenlike an' stiff.

The minister crackit aboot a' things,
Inquirin' concernin' the fowk,
An' sune Jemmie's tongue had lowsened strings
An' he ventured upon a jowk.
Then the man o' gudeness spak' the word
Wi' courage, wi' love sae strang
That it pierced tae's heart like a twa-edged sword,
Till he kent he need nae mair gae wrang.

Ye maun gang tae the kirk wad ye see Jemmie noo,
For he climbs the poopit stair
An' lays doon the buiks, then gaes tae a pew
Tae staun' throughoot the lang prayer.
He keeps clean the kirk, mak's the window-panes clear,
At the manse he gies a haun',
Fu' of guid warks, for twenty year
He's been the minister's man.

PROVIDENCE

THEY laid my man aneath the mools
I' the bonny month o' May,
He was gane afore the apple trees
Cam' oot in their bride array;
Nae mair frae the morning-glory blooms
Wad he pluck the pairfect bell,
Aye, he wad miss the rarest thing—
A blossom frae life itsel.

The grass was green, the mound aboon
When I kent my hoor had come,
And wi' it the pangs o' the nether warld,—
I was like ane blind an' dumb;
Then I saw the babe laid at ma side,
An' speech cam' sae I could pray;
Wi' mem'ries rich o' my dear man's love
In thankfu'ness I lay.

The babe had need for muckle care
Like a shilpit little lamb,
An' I had the chairge o' ither three,
Puir mither that I am;
Ma bonny haun's grew harsh wi' wark
An' little o' sleep had I,
But somehow, somehow claes an' meat
Were provided as days gaed by.

Then freends o' my dear man colloqued
Tae gie us a cottage roof,
An' sae his faim'ly had a hame,
An' the promise o' Gude a proof;
But nae relief did I gie mysel'
Till ma lads were college-bred,
An' ma lass had honor for skill in her wark,
An' sae the lang years were sped.

We were cleeded weel, an' had mony freends,
And a marvel tae mony was I
Wha's faith gied youthfu' happiness
And grit tae endure forbye;
An' faither tae the faitherless,
The widow's stay proved He—
The Gude o' Isaac an' Abraham,
An' Israel's God, tae me!

MARTHA

MARTHA maun rise wi' the Sawbath sun's fairst glow,
Tae her this day o' the week's the best;
The Saturday-polished shoon are a' in a row,
The Saturday-roasted meat for cauld-cuts ready,
The bread o' finest flour has been bakit,
The sea-moss dessert has a' been shapit—
She's awake the mair to enjoy the leisure o' rest.

When it's time to gang tae the kirk she has a' things trig,
The Buik wi' her folded kerchief fine
Smellin' o' lavender; she'll hae a sprig
O' southernwood, an' for the collection a penny;
For mony a year she's been prood o' her bonnet
Wi' autumn leaves an' wheat ears on it,
But o' pride her meek broon dress disna show ony sign.

When she tiptoes into her pew she's nae mair obsairved
Than the pheasant hen 'mang the stibble broon;
She's haein' service noo frae them she has served.
When the minister wales his text he'll pause for a minute
And look on them a' wi' a smile sae kindly
Her een hae a mist that mak's her see blindly,
But a happy heart is beating under the shabby goon.

Gif the preachin's lang, an' she's tempted wi' a hint
O' sleep, she'll gie hersel' shairp rebuke,
Then tak' frae her poke a sonsie peppermint,
An' try aince mair tae follow the points o' the sairmon;
But she has na sae muckle thocht o' the preachin'
As love for the man whas' life's aye reachin'
His flock wi' the gentle spirit and power o' the Buik.

When the fowk are scalin' frae the kirk awa',

Then Martha wi' them wends as in a trance;
They gang tae flock and herd, tae hoose and ha',
Tae bench an' loom, tae foundry, shop an' smiddy;
Fine fowk may they be, an' jaunty,
But Martha, the meek ane, is cantie,
O' the hale congregation there's maist need o' her i' the manse.

RAB O' THE FAIRM

THERE was a lang lane gaed doon tae the river
Through wide fields and green fields an' fields wi' furrows
laid;

Ev'ry breath o' breeze gart the silver poplar quiver An' the stane hoose was biggit in its shade.

For hay the lofts were biggit, and barns tae store the sheaves in;
A fold, aye, an ricks, for the flock o' sheep forbye.
The dug had his kennel, an' the horses had a stable,
And a byre was for the owsen an' the kye.

Rab had a wheen sons and also mony dochters,
And a fine brisk wife, the ruler o' the roost;
Mony times, i' the clash o' her dinna's an' her ocht-to's,
He'd feel that oot the hoose he had been coost.

The dukes had their pond an' the chuckies place tae roost in, But whaur was place for Rab tae find a bit o' peace? Sae he roofed ower a shop, an' when his tools were gaithered He began makin' skeps for the bees.

And then he made the bonniest o' cages for canaries,
An' sune i' the kitchen had the wee birds thrang;
And ever when the women-fowk were arguin' contraries
The birds wad droon the clatter wi' their sang.

THE COBBLER

THE SHOP had the odor o' leather
An' the smell o' roset an' wax;
There were cauf-skin boots by the window,
An' brogues wi' airn tacks;
Twa-'hree sides o' cauf-skin
A' shiny an' smooth an' black;
A roll o' bull-hide that creakit
If ye frae your stool leaned back.

I likit it weel when the cobbler
Was fixin' shoon wi' their soles;
Ae tap on the awl wi' the hammer,
Twa taps pit the pegs in their holes;
Or when he laid doon a pattern
An' the wee knife cut oot a shape
Wi' its edge worn awa' wi' honin',
Sae aft he gied it scrape-scrape.

Eight

What think ye the dream o' the cobbler, Wi' birstled wax-end in ae hand And an awl wi' a crook i' the ither—'Twas tae veesit the Holy Land! At nicht by the glow o' his cruisie He'd read o' the Land i' the Buik, Till his mind was fu' o' fine pictures O' ilka sacred neuk.

'Twas a dream wi' hopes an' visions
As the seasons slippit past,
And a' he had frae the neebors
Was: Shoemaker stick tae your last;
An' fairst o' the year to gang barefit,
E'en in the cauld spring rains,
For them tae be savin' shoe-leather,
Wad be the cobbler's weans.

* * * MAISIE

MAISIE in the city
Had jist ae thing in mind,
Her heart was sick wi'longin'
For flo'ers o' ony kind.

She telt aboot the daisies
An' the scarlet pimpernel;
Her dreams were dreams o' roses
And o' the Scotch bluebell.

She'd haunt the florist-window Tae see a rose tree in bloom; But roses nae man gied her For her tiny, aye tidy room.

An' never could she buy ony
Wha' jist could earn her bread;
Wi' colored flo'ers she broidered
Seein' real anes instead.

Came a day when her haun's were folded, An' the warl's hopes an' cures Wad never mair be needed— Then her ain fowk sent her flo'ers.

A CUP O' KINDNESS

SHE LEANED ower his chair,
For she kent o' the sadness,
An' his heart that was sair
Had a new warmth o' gladness.
New hope it could borrow,
For a wistfu' to-morrow;
There was easement o' sorrow
As she leaned ower his chair.

She leaned ower his chair
Wi' the love o' a mither.
He's his ain man aince mair;
Life's threads a' through-ither
Cam' free frae the tangle;
He was quat o' the jangle
O' tongues in a wrangle,
As she leaned ower his chair.

She leaned ower his chair
Nae parlance tae fashion;
He jist was aware
O' the deeps o' compassion;
O' words he'd heard mony,
But o' peace pried na ony;
Aince again life seemed bonny
As she leaned ower his chair.

She wha leaned ower his chair
Didna ken o' the healing—
As the sun gars fowk share
In its licht o' revealing,
He saw a' things fairer;
Bringin' joy she was sharer,
O' kindness cup-bearer,
As she leaned ower his chair.

+ + + JANET

JANET, O Janet, tak' chairge o' the Lad, Aye when they drove awa' they'd say; She didna bother was his conduct guid or bad— All she kent aboot it was her honest heart was glad For bein' in his guid company. Janet early risin' milks the coo i' the byre,
An' has the parritch pluffin' i' the pat;
A' day she's busy warkin', ye'd think she couldna tire,
At eve she toasts the aitcake an' red herrin' at the fire,
An' last ane up at nicht pits oot the cat.

Janet, little body, takin' guid care o' the Wean, Singin' him ''The Land o' the Leal,'' Nae langer feelin' she'd naebody her ain, Nae mair aweary wi' the dreigh, lang lane That never had a turnin' for her weal.

Janet, lowly Janet, prayin' for release—
Carried on the throbbing wings o' pain,
Findin' in God's maircy the balm o' rest an' peace,
My praises for your faithfulness are no like tae cease,
And noo for a' your losses ye hae gain.

ECONOMY

SHE LOVED the awnie barley
An' the tall upstandin' rye,
The wheat wi' ears sae heavy
An' the broon buckwheat forbye;
But maist she liked the blawin'
O' the wind, wi' gusts an' waits,
That gars lang waves come flowin'
Across the tasseled aits.

When the aits had gaen tae the miller
An' the crackit meal cam' hame
There'd be rowth for halesome crowdie
Tae comfort the cravin' wame;
Ye'd say wi' acres o' plenty
How rich the guid wife wad feel,
And in gien' her folks their parritch
Wadna think to save the meal.

But tho' it was halesome farin'
Nane wad she waste for a' that,
When the ithers were suppin' their crowdie
Oor John maun scart the pat;
Neist day she wad ca' for Jenny
Wi' her spune frae the pat tae sup,
Till 'twas a' as clean's a whustle
An' the last ait eaten up.

SAXPENCE LOST

MA BUSY lass, ma bonny lass, A dear wee lass this day; Ower-lang I keepit ye at wark And ye had nae thocht o' play.

Noo what'll ye hae, an' what do ye say An' what'll ye hae in your dish? I'd wear ma thooms oot for your guid; Jist whisper what's your wish.

I think I ken, I'm sure I ken,
I think that I ken weel,
A gingerbread man wi' almond een,
And a belt o' citron peel.

Flour I hae, an' spice I hae, An' ginger o' ma ain, Almond nits, an' citron peel, But treacle I hae nane.

Here is a jug, tak' ye the jug
An' bring ye the jug back,
An' here's wi' it a saxpenny bit,
An' the treacle maun be black.

What's daein' noo, an' what's for you, An' what's for you? I pray. It's treacle we need for ginger-bread; Saxpenny worth I'll hae.

She gaed wi' him, she stayed wi' him, Till the treacle filled the jug, Frae the spiggot o' the treacle barr'l Pourin' wi'oot a glug.

Here's a piece corn-cob for a cork, Noo, whaur's your saxpenny bit? Ah, then were fears, and a lassie's tears, I' the jug it had been pit.

The grocer lauched, Oh ho, ha, ha!
Then he kissed the maid forlorn.
Rin hame, wee lass, for your ginger-bread;
Ye may bring me a bit i' the morn.

Twelve

Noo footsteps lag, an' her shouthers sag, An' her footsteps lag i' the way. She's fu' o' shame, an' laith to gae hame, For what wull the mither say?

Sae her fears were thrang—but joy gaed clang, Her joy gaed clang like a bell, Said mither: ma bairn, hae nae concern, I did the same thing masel'.

O that gingerbread man! Think if ye can
O' the finest tale ever telt,
And o' the expense, for he had the saxpence,
An' there it was under his belt.

CHILD MARJORIE

IS THERE nae romance for wee Marjorie, A wean wi' a woman's care? She's up i' the morn at the skreigh o' day, Puir lass, she disna ken hoo tae play, She has aye the burden o' wark tae bear, And naebody tak's a share.

Her faither depends on wee Marjorie
For the gettin' o' a' his meals;
An' for her wee sisters she maun prepare,
Efter fixin' their claes an' camin' their hair;
Then they're aff tae schule wi' lauchin' an' squeals,
Little carin' hoo Marjorie feels.

Then the babby a' day maun be fed an' amused,
An' wark maun gae on i' the hoose.

She maun gang tae the market an' carry the wean
An' hame wi' the basket maun stacher, wi' nane
Tae gie a bit help she at fairst micht refuse
Then be glad o't, an' cantie and croose.

There were twa-'hree guid days for wee Marjorie:
She'd gae oot wi' her hair nicely camed;
Her basket was cared for, her heart was glad,
Wha brocht it hame but a neebor lad?
Then he cam' nae mair; he was no tae be blamed,
For they teased him tae mak' him ashamed.

Thirteen

What silly auld fowk tae scourge wi' the tongue
That willna let kindness be free!
For the love o' heaven be kind tae the young,
Though amang yoursel's ye may sting an' be stung!
Noo a' o' romance for child Marjorie
Is juist a bit memorie.

THE GAIRD'NER

I DREED ma weird i' the City Whaur a' was strange tae me; Ma need was sair for the gairden They ca' Gethsemane.

The man that was the gaird'ner
He saw ma een were sad,
An' spak wi' me sae gently:
I'll tak' your bit o' a lad—

Rest here a wee while, Lassie, An' be acqua'nt wi' grief, The flo'ers like Balm o' Gilead May gie your hurt relief.

He'd hae ma laddie help him— He gied ma hour tae me! Ma heart was wae for Andra An' his Gethsemane.

Saut tears drappt on ma letter,
The last frae his dear hand,—
Afore it cam' he perished
I' the mud o' No-Man's Land.

Alane wi' the keen wind blawin'
Was the body I held sae dear;
I could feel the cauld rain fallin'
Like mony a bitter tear.

Peace cam' like the sun arisin'
Sae warm an' kind, an' a voice
Spak' clear, Seek ye the living,
Live on, love on, rejoice.

Fourteen

I could see ma man was a victor Unharmed by death an' the grave, Wha's love for his wife an' bairnie Wad help them baith tae be brave.

An' sune ma babby cam' rinnin' Tae tell his mither his joy; Jist burstin' wi' his importance He felt like an up-grown boy.

The gaird'ner had ca'd him assistant
Tae be much depended upon;
An' had kept him baith happy an' busy
Shooin' sparrows awa' frae the lawn.

* * * AULD FASHIONED GAIRDEN

WHAUR is Jennie Comyn's gairden noo?
It has nae space ava';
Nae root nor branch nor stem remains,
Nae vines alang the wa',
Nae bonny blooms o' white an' blue,
Yet I can show tae you:

The bush o' yellow roses, you'll like these
Like flamin' suns spread oot;
See the bumble bee come roarin' in
And wi' bizzin' rin aboot
Till wi' yellow dust he's loaded his knees
An' gaes aff wi' a boom through the trees.

See the hollyhocks o' white an' yellow an' red;
The sun gars them glow like flame.
There's the soond o' innumerable bees
Fleein' frae far awa' hame,
An' hustlin' into the hive wi' bee-bread
For the nurslin's wha maun be fed.

They search the red rose's heart; like bits o' gold
They move on the pallid rose
(White blooms that shine i' the pale munelicht)
An' the foxglove maun unclose
An' the Canterbury bells unfold
Tae the bustlin' raiders bold.

Here's a fine wee spicy bush o' southernwood, Ye can tak' a bit tae the kirk An' be thinkin' o' odors o' spikenard An' myrrh, while the preacher's at wark Tae show wi' eloquence lang an' lood The fairst man's ingratitude.

Here's bachelor buttons the lads dinna like to wear; They wad raither hae buttons made fast By some ane wi' skilfu' needle wha cared, Wha's carin' an' love wad last Like the cedars, but yet they hardly dare Tae mak' o' their hope a prayer.

Can ye feel the denty smell o' the mignonette An' the spicy odor o' thyme? Can ye feel like a soond the flamin' red O' the scarlet runners that climb Awa' up higher than ye can get Whaur the gallery roof is set?

An' there's johnny-jump-ups hidin' amang the grass, That miched frae the pansy bed, Truants ower wild for the gairden schule, Dutchman's breeches an' balsams red, An' cockscomb finery an' bluebells you pass-But whaur is Jeannie, the lass?

I can a'maist hear, or so it seems tae me, On the leaves the gentle rain That gushed frae the rose o' her waterin' can, But for her I listen in vain,-For her mither's "Welcome, an' hoo is thee?"-'Tis a gairden o' memorie.

NOTE BY THE WRITER

In his preface to "A Northern Anthology" John Buchan says: "To those accustomed to one dialect only, let me repeat the adotce to read aloud." He confesses that the dialect might not now represent spoken language. But there is a language of memory, of the heart. When a former Chap-book, entitled "Bits o' Verse in Scols," was placed in the hands of one unacquainted with the dialect, I asked him to try reading aloud. "Profiting by your suggestion," he says. "I read it freely and naturally and have been astonished at my almost perfect understanding of it." In my young days men used to speak in Scols when they were merry, to tell a good story, when they would give quaint addice to a child, or when there was tenderness to be expressed to one much beloved.

Sixteen

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Lorne Pierce—Editor

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*The Chap-Books marked with an asterisk are now out of print.

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