

The PEOPLE'S Voice

Scottish Political Poetry, Song and the Franchise, 1832–1918

Anthology

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**Part Two: Poems relating to the Representation
of the People Acts, 1867-8**

20. The Glesca' Carter.

This song is by James Houston (born 1828), a well-known music-hall performer. An engineer by profession, during the 1860s he was working in engineering firms by day and performing at night. There is a lively and entertaining account of his life and music-hall adventures in *Autobiography of Mr James Houston, Scotch Comedian* (Glasgow: John Menzies, 1889). 'The Glesca' Carter', published with other poems and songs at the end of the *Autobiography*, definitely relates to the second Reform Bill of 1867, and probably specifically to the October 1866 Reform demonstration at which John Bright, radical politician and hero of reformers, addressed a large Glasgow meeting. This song also falls into a popular 1860s music-hall genre of 'sensation songs'. These tended to reference the perceived sensationalism of the 1860s and feature a hapless character who narrates their involvement in dramatic and entertaining events. The performer would break into 'sensational' dance styles ('jumping' songs were also popular) on the chorus: presumably Houston did a comic imitation of driving a cart in this one. No tune is given, but the verses are in a standard pattern and would have been sung to a known tune.

Carters, as a profession, were stereotypically known for supporting reform, so it is not surprising that Jock stands up for his rights against the aristocracy and gives a political speech at Glasgow Green. But, even in these comic verses, it shows us how Glasgow working-class men were represented as strongly pro-reform. It also shows us that there was no separation between the comic and the political on the music-hall stage. Houston and his audience of predominately working-class men and women would have supported reform also, but they could also gently mock the stereotype of the zealous reformer. The song segued into a lengthy section of comic Scots prose, not reproduced here.

Kirstie Blair

The folk are a' gaun roarin' mad
Tae hear some new sensation,
Sae I maun try what I can add
Tae meet your expectation.
I'm a rattlin' carter chap,
At drivin' I'm a smerter;
In fact, I'll tell ye in a word,
I'm Jock the Glesca' carter.

Gee whoo, hip, an' gee back,
Hip an' gee back, whoa vain, sir;
I'm a Glesca' carter chap,
Jack Thomson is my name, sir.

I was drivin' across the brig the day,
My horse had just got on it,
When a swell began tae tak' his nap
Aff my Kilmarnock bonnet;
I drew my whip across his legs,
By jing he did but start, sir;
Says I, the bonnet an' whip, ye see,

Belangs tae Jock the carter.

In Glesca' Green the ither day,
At the great demonstration,
Mr. Bright was fairly in the shade
When I gied my oration;
For spoutin' about politics,
I ha'e got the art, sir;
So listen an' ye'll hear a speech,
Frae Jock the Glesca' carter.

Autobiography of Mr. James Houston, Scotch Comedian (Glasgow: Menzies and Love, 1889),
p. 193.

21. Reform.

This poem first appeared in the *Airdrie Advertiser* on 24 November 1866, next to an editorial on 'The New Reform Bill', so it forms part of the Scottish Liberal press's support for reform in 1866-67. Like most pro-reform poems of this period, it praises radical pro-reform MP, John Bright. It also moves from the specific issue of reform to a broader denunciation of the privileges of rank, wealth and station. 'D. T., Hillend' was a familiar figure in the newspaper poetry columns. Thomson was a working man who, by the late 1860s, was keeper of the reservoir at Hillend. In *Modern Scottish Poets* vol. 2 (Brechin: D.H. Edwards, 1881, p.112), editor D. H. Edwards cites him as an overtly political and implicitly radical poet. 'He took great interest in the political and social movements of his time, and gave expression to his sentiments with a vigour and directness which left no room for misunderstanding as to the leaning of his sympathies.'

Kirstie Blair

I hear that monster freedom's foe,
Base Toryism, crying,
That it has got a fearfu' blow,
An' thinks itsel' a-dying.

For Johnny Bricht, wi' patriot micht,
Has roond it fetters locked,
An' wi' fair justice, manhood's richt,
He has it maistly choked.

But yet its Heralds soond its praise,
An' every scheme are trying,
Tae lengthen oot the tyrant's days,
A' puir men's richts denyng.

Sic touting doctors canna save
A thing sae foul an' tainted,
For soon 'twill fill a traitor's grave,
An' winna be lamented.

Then merit will not meet wi' scorn,
Or worth be unrewarded;
Men will be noble, tho' low-born,
An' rank be disregarded.

For sense maun tak' the place o' pride,
An' walth a lower station,
When honesty flings fraud aside,
An' virtue guides oor nation.

The rich will not the puir then slicht,
Just for the very reason,

That richt will stan' its ain 'gainst micht,
An' nane daur ca' it treason.

David Thomson, *Musings Among the Heather* (Edinburgh: Thomson Brothers, 1881), p.238.

22. On the Death of an Old Reformer.

David Carnegie was a factory worker and political and social poet from Arbroath, who published primarily in the local and Dundee press. The person lamented here has not been identified, but the poem serves as an important elegy for an older reformer, active in 1830s radicalism and Chartism, by a younger and more moderate reformer of the 1860s. The glorious day that William lived to see is likely that of the Second Reform Act in 1867, so the poem again reflects upon the relationship between the 1830s and the 1860s.

Kirstie Blair

TO-DAY, old friend! thy lifeless form
Was laid into its last, lone bed,
And, standing by thy open grave,
I thought upon a promise made—
A promise made long years ago—
That if I lived, and had the skill,
My humble muse should sing thy dirge.
I'll try that promise to fulfil:

Farewell, old William, fare-thee-well!
Thy ringing voice no more we'll hear,
Proclaiming all the bitter wrongs
Which tyrant wealth makes labour bear.
Thou wert a hater, fierce and keen,
Of all who durst oppress the poor,
Though seated on a purple throne
Or strutting o'er a factory floor.

Justice and Right thou boldly claimed
As parts of Heaven's eternal laws,
And deemed him foe to God and man
Who tried to stifle Freedom's cause.
The People's Charter thou espoused
With all a patriot's fiery zeal,
And long thou toil'd to win that power
Which all our wrongs would surely heal.

Thou hast not lived to see it won,
But thou hast lived and seen that day
When ancient barriers were hewn down,
And old traditions thrown away.
We sometimes thought thee too severe
When Whigs and Tories were thy theme,
But well we knew thou were sincere—
Thy principles no boyish dream.

And whilst thy tongue denounced the wrongs

Inflicted on the helpless poor,
No wretched wanderer pled in vain
Whom want brought to thy humble door.

David Carnegie, *Lays and Lyrics from the Factory* (Arbroath: Thomas Buncle, 1879), p. 59.

23. The Reform Bill

This poem is embedded in an advertisement in a part of the newspaper normally confined to commercial interests. William Anderson, as the advertisement suggests, was a wholesale and retail tea and coffee merchant, with two premises. According to the Post Office Directory for this time, he himself lived at 4 Adelphi Place. The poem is chiefly of interest as an exemplar of how deeply the reform agitation had penetrated popular culture and how one trader sought to take advantage of this. The poem itself is non-committal: why, after all, would Anderson wish to alienate support from either Liberal or Tory? However, with GLADSTONE in capital letters, Anderson is clearly aware that the name would attract attention. (There are a good number of 'Gladstone' poems in the database.)

Catriona M.M. Macdonald

TEA! TEA!! TEA!!!

Throughout the land's fair length and breadth
Hath been of late a storm
Of politicians great and small,
In clamours for reform;

But when, upon the twelfth of March,
An anxious day for many,
The Bill, so long looked forward to,
Had scarce a charm for any.

And while this great imperfect scheme
GLADSTONE'S attention fills,
ANDERSON would whisper in your ear,
Reform your household bills.

His is the Best TEA you can buy,
And Cheapest too as well;
And these are genuine reforms,
As you who buy will tell.

—
A GREAT portion of the First and Finest Arrivals of each New Season's Teas is consigned to W. ANDERSON; and in consequence of the enormous Sales which he can effect, he is enabled to dispose of them at Prices which defy competition. The following, among others, are to be had at the Pagoda Establishments, 116 TRONGATE, and 105 DALMARNOCK ROAD, GLASGOW:—

Green Gunpowder tea, finest,	3s 8d per lb.
Good Strong Black Tea,	1s 6d "
Very Fine Souchong Tea, Rich and Well Flavoured	1s 8d "

Paisley Herald, 12 May 1866.

24. The Franchise O' Women – A Song

'The Franchise O' Women' was published in the *Dundee Advertiser*, a daily newspaper whose editorial position was pro-reform and which generally attracted a left-wing or radical-leaning audience. As this poem demonstrates, this alignment did not always translate to all areas of their politics. The anonymous poet counters John Stuart Mill's support of women's rights with an argument based on the existence of a 'natural' family structure, a structure which may have seemed to the author to be increasingly under threat as the number of married women in full-time employment increased in Dundee. Few poems in genuine support of women's suffrage made it into the nineteenth-century Dundee newspapers, though the issue was evidently discussed outside of the press. For example, female workers carried a banner demanding women's suffrage at the 1867 reform demonstration.

Erin Farley

The order o' Nature has made itsel' plain
That wives should be subject, not slaves, to their men.
That family franchise, wi' union o' will,
Is safe frae the logic o' Johnnie Stewart Mill.

This fact, o' itsel', should his logic destroy –
Men fecht for the richts that their women enjoy;
Gin law be but usage, and usage be law,
The franchise o' women is nane o' the twa.

Whaur marriage is sacred atween man an' wife,
Nae Court o' Divorce needs t' part them for strife;
A vote frae a wife is a vote frae her man –
Their hearts are united – their tongues are at one.

Instead o' the union o' titles and lands,
Let hearts be united on joinin' o hands:
The first's the disease, an' the second's the cure –
The hame will be happy, the State mair secure.

Reform i' our hames, an' our persons sedate,
Will hush a' the clamours o' Church an' o' State;
When women are mithers, an' fathers are men,
The practice o life will its theories restrain.

The outcome o' virtue is made t' depend
On the means use'd at hame to lead to its end;
Let hame be held sacred as Nature's ain school,
An' a sophist like Mill be set down as a fool.

X.

Dundee Advertiser, Saturday 5 January 1867.

25. Reform!

This verse was performed by Frank Hill of the Theatre Royal, Aberdeen, at the local branch meeting of the National Reform League. Described as 'a stump speech after the manner of music hall orators,' Hill appeared on stage 'in the character of Minerva' on the evening of Saturday 26 October 1867. A report on the evening appeared in the *Dundee Advertiser* the following Tuesday, which noted that the crowd was not large, but was composed mainly of young people, including several women. The Mr Shearer addressed in the verse was the Aberdeen Branch president. This verse was not written to directly advance the cause of reform itself. Rather, it was part of the social culture of the reform movement, and was intended for an audience of campaigners. As such, it is less of a polemic and more of a light-hearted satire on the political scene in Britain and in Aberdeen itself, mixing references to local developments concerning the harbour with references to national news, like Thomas Carlyle's anti-household suffrage essay 'Shooting Niagara,' published earlier that year.

Erin Farley

Reform! Soul-stirring sound. Old things are become new, and new things are become remarkable – *very!* Is not the war cry of Garibaldi echoing over the fair land of Italy? Doth not the Tories of Edinburgh eat leeks with Disraeli in the banqueting halls of Auld Reekie? Hath not the sage of Greenwich – Thomas Carlyle – been *shooting Niagara*; and why shouldn't I – I shoot Niagara – or any other man? Tell me that! I pause for a reply.

Reform! Yes –

Reform abroad, Reform at home –

On Highland hill, and ocean's foam;

Send Abyssinia's captives free,

Let Fenian knaves the knaves' fate dree;

dree - endure

Down with each ill stands men between,

Up with the shout – Long live the Queen!

Reform! Reform! Reform! Reform!

The old Fish Market, now at length removed,

The Harbour entrance, too, must straightway be improved;

Right from this sheet to Torry's Mountain ridge,

You soon shall tread a safe inviting bridge –

Thence shall we cross all – all untolled and free,

And watch the little fishes sporting in the Dee!

Reform!

My friends, there's nothing can be surer, clearer,

Reform's embodied here in Mr Shearer.

Dundee Advertiser, 29 October 1867.

26. A Non-Elector's Soliloquy.

This poem, exploiting Hamlet's famous soliloquy, was published in *The Eclipse* – one of three journals that shaped the 1868 general election in Paisley. While the other two were very much aligned to particular party interests (*The Hoo'let* (Tory) and *The Hawk* (Liberal)), *The Eclipse* sought to lampoon all vested interests in the contest, and frequently used the character of the jester to emphasise its playful and satirical intent. Here the dilemma of those deciding whether to vote, rather than for whom to vote, is the focus and relates to the relationship between the compilation of the voting register, the payment of local rates and the qualifications for the franchise. This relationship had attracted a great deal of interest and debate during the deliberations in parliament. For further insight, see Robert Saunders, 'The Politics of Reform and the Making of the Second Reform Act, 1848-1867' in *The Historical Journal*, 50, 3 (2007), pp. 571-591. In simple terms, it meant that many had to weigh up what the vote meant to them financially, as it came at a cost: one had to have been assessed and paid local taxes.

Catriona M.M. Macdonald

To vote or not to vote! that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in a non, to suffer
The sneers and laughter of the upper ten,
Or to take arms against the aristocracy,
And by his clamour fright them? To vote, to vote—
That's all: and, by our votes, to say we end
Our anger, and the thousand natural thoughts
That nons are heirs to—'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wished. To vote—eh, what?—
To vote! but first to pay: aye, there's the rub;
For when we pay our rates, what more may come,
When that collector haunts up our arrears,
Must give us pause; there's the dire thought,
That makes us still dislike to vote.
For who would bear our state for any time,
A Treasurer's gab, a Councillor's contempt,
The silence of our member, and the spurns
That brains and labour of some big wean take,
When he himself might eas'ly get a vote
By a mere payment. Who would such torment bear,
To live a weary non-electors life,
But that the dread of that collector's book,
The great and fearful volume, on whose leaves
Our money's never marked, puzzles the will,
And makes us rather bear those ills we have,
Than pay up rates, whose sum we know not of?

The Eclipse, 14 November 1868, p. 7.

27. A Veteran Tory's Lament.

John Ramsay, born in Kilmarnock in 1802, was a carpet-weaver and eventually spirit-dealer: he states in the preface to *Gleanings of the Gloamin'* that he first began publishing in the *Edinburgh Literary Journal*, and that he had notable success with an earlier volume (*Woodnotes of a Wanderer*). His life is briefly discussed in D. H. Edwards, *Modern Scottish Poets*, vol 3 (Brechin: D.H. Edwards, 1881, pp.270-1). The elections of 1868 were the first held after the Second Reform Act. The poem most likely references Ballochmyle because Claud Alexander of Ballochmyle was the losing Tory candidate in the 1868 election in South Ayrshire. The new constituency of North Ayrshire had also narrowly elected a Liberal candidate, hence 'We're vanquished north, we're vanquished south'. Ballochmyle was, moreover, likely to be known to readers from Burns's song 'The Lass O' Ballochmyle'. Ramsay's verses fit the song tune to some degree, though the subject-matter is very different. This poem is a devil's or 'deil's' lament, not an uncommon genre for satirical verse in the period. 'The Deil's Reply to Robert Burns', attributed by some to Burns himself, was one example circulating in various forms in the mid-Victorian period. Ramsay's Tory Satan nostalgically references a number of highly controversial political and religious events from the 1830s onwards, including the Rathcormac Massacre in Cork in 1843, when soldiers enforcing the collection of Church of Ireland tithes killed a number of protesting Catholic locals, and the Corn Laws. The reference to flogging is specifically to Alexander Somerville, a soldier whose brutal flogging in 1832 was widely attributed to his support for pro-Reform protestors (this case is referenced in 'The Flogged Soldier' appearing earlier in this collection). 'A Veteran Tory's Lament' thus suggests the direct continuity of Tory outrages from the 1830s to the 1860s, and implies that 1867 may have marked a major turning point. Since the reference to Claverhouse is probably to John Graham of Claverhouse, active in the seventeenth century and with a reputation for repression against Covenanters, the poem also connects recent history to a longer Scottish history of aristocratic rule.

Kirstie Blair

On the result of the election of 1868.

'Twas somewhere near to Ballochmyle,
The deil was met gaun down a brae,
And aye he sadly sung the while,
Alake! alake! we've lost the day.

We're vanquished north, we're vanquished south,
For a' that I could do or say,
By that auld hatefu' limmer Truth,
Alake! alake! we've lost the day.

I've laughed the working folk to see,
Their faces grim wi' want and wae.
While my freens lived in luxury,
But now, alake! we've lost the day.

I've laughed to see his lordship's game

Eat up the crap, the farmer sent
Adrift for killing ane o' them,
And roupit out to pay the rent.

I've laughed to see a man strung up
For writing o' anither's name,
Or maybe stealing o' a tup,
Or bread to fill a hungry wame.

I've laughed to see puir Papist Pat
Beneath the Kirk o' England grane,
It ser'd my cause far better that,
Than either Hume, Voltaire, or Paine.

To see from shrieking misery torn
The tithe, at point of bayonet,
Rathcormack made me cock my horn,
That scene, oh! how can I forget?

And I have sat unseen in court,
And chuckled with infernal glee,
To see their *dernier ressort*,
The voters coined by perjury.*

A flunkie swear himsel' a laird,
That hadna got a single stane,
Nor yet o' mither yirth a yard,
Or coat that he could ca' his ain.

Meantime the titled instigator, †
To that most sapient sucking pigeon,
The public, played the demonstrator
On ethics, politics, religion.

But what me tickled best ava
Was that most glorious tax on bread;
It made the puir man's cake sae sma'
And tripped up the heels of trade.

And O! how rich it was to stand
Red, reeking heaps o' carnage o'er,
And see the conqueror's ruthless band
Ride fetlock-deep in human gore!

And then to see the soldier brave,
For a' his battles, marches, drills,
Tied up like some puir recreant slave,

And flogged till blood ran o'er his heels.

Those were the days, the glorious days,
When statesman, courtier, king, and priest,
Could ride the nation their own ways,
Like some great stupid, patient beast.

Confound the Liberals, ane and a',
Were they but pinioned neck and heel,
And into my ain torture ha',
My certy! I would mak' them squeal.

Would Claverhouse again come back,
I'd hunt them a' o'er bank and brae;
But that is now a feckless crack,
Alake! alake! we've lost the day.

What mair he said, or where he gaed,
My douce informant didna say,
But up the glen lang came the mane,
Alake! alake! we've lost the day.

* During the election of 1841 we were sojourning in a county town on the Border, where this was carried on to a most scandalous extent. It was quite patent to the public, and must have had a deteriorating influence. The majority of the parties who had thus perjured themselves went home intoxicated. If these men afterwards acted dishonestly by their employers, it was only a natural, and I should almost say a necessary consequence.

† A Scotch Conservative nobleman, who was once delivering a lecture in a Mechanics' Institute in the West, strongly recommended religion to the people; he was at that period one of the leading magnates of the Turf, and but a short time previous had spent the Sabbath in curling on a pond in front of his own castle.

John Ramsay (1802–1879), *Gleanings of the Gloamin'* (London: J. and W. Rider, 1870), pp. 50-53.

28. The Battle of the Kilmarnock Burghs.

The general election which followed the passage of the Second Reform Act provided a great deal of fodder for poetry in the Kilmarnock Burghs constituency. The incumbent Liberal MP, Edward Pleydell-Bouverie (1818–1889), a son of the Earl of Radnor, had represented the burghs for almost twenty-five years, but in 1868 a subset of the local electors were sufficiently dissatisfied with his moderate stance on reform and his poor relationship with the Liberal leader William Ewart Gladstone to invite an 'Advanced Liberal' to challenge him. This outsider was Edwin Chadwick (1800–1890), a social reformer who had the backing of John Stuart Mill, which served to give the contest a national profile. Bouverie wrote to Mill reproaching him for his divisiveness, to which Mill responded: 'it is very much to be desired that every constituency should consider, not merely whether a man will do to represent it, but whether he is the best man to be had'. Bouverie took exception to this and published the correspondence in the *Times*; it was then reprinted in the Ayrshire papers (see *Ayr Advertiser* on 22 October 1868). However, Chadwick was not the only one to throw his hat into the ring: he was joined by Alexander Macdonald (1821–1881), the president of the Miners' National Association and a future Lib-Lab MP, and Robert Thomson, an independent with an idiosyncratic platform that centred around land distribution. No Tory stood for election.

This atypical set of candidates was a fertile source of inspiration for contributors to the *Kilmarnock Standard*, who all maintained the newspaper's establishment Liberal stance by portraying Bouverie's rivals as inherently comic figures: Chadwick as an elderly boffin, Macdonald as a troglodytic opportunist and Thomson as a harebrained eccentric. 'The Battle of the Kilmarnock Burghs' was published a few days before the election but accurately predicts the outcome: the candidates, imagined here as knights at a joust, are vanquished in the same order in which they finished in the polls, and each meets his demise in a manner that lines up with the character traits that have been satirised in the paper's poetry column for weeks leading up to the election. The poem is typical in its treatment of the contest as a burlesque with a foregone conclusion; the more left-leaning candidates will play out their parts but voters will ultimately come to their senses and remain faithful (marriage metaphors abound). The *Kilmarnock Standard* poets are concerned to recuperate the moderate Bouverie, representative of the status quo, as a fighter to whom the recently enfranchised should be grateful for their good fortune.

Honor Rieley

I sing of a battle, of battles the best
All over broad Scotland, at least in the West;
A battle stirred up by the new Reform Bill,
A battle fought out with both vigour and skill.

Old Russell may boast of Reform Number One,
For Progress advanced like a spring morning sun,
And struggled, while mists nearly hid her from view,
Till she burst forth unclouded with Bill Number Two.

Old poets have sung and old chroniclers tell
How our boroughs to Tories and Radicals fell,
But rent by division and faction complete,

'Twas hard to tell who was secure in his seat—

Till Bouverie, the son of a Liberal lord,
For Liberal principles unsheathed his sword;
Though calumny oft might make free with his name,
Yet still he preserved all untarnished his fame.

Thus Bouverie victorious the trophy has gained,
And for twenty-five years in his keeping remained,
Till three rival foemen now come to compete,
And have sworn to undo him—a difficult feat.

These three wrathful fighters, with hearts big with fate,
Now offer to tinker our kettle of State;
And champion Mac. stumps on to the field,
And, with a great pick axe, he thunders out "yield."

"By the shade of great Palmerston," Bouverie cries,
"Before I surrender these boroughs I prize,
I'll appeal to the voters, the old, and the new,
Who would still be unfranchised had I not proved true."

Then Chadwick, the Millite, no speech would pretend,
But statistics, he said, he could ply without end,
And certificates too; so with great greedy eyes,
Like a cat at a mouse, he would thus seize the prize.

Then Robin stalked forward, all burly and strong,
Encased in great speeches, at least three hours long;
He showed how all others would fade and grow dim—
All opponents would sink, and great Robin would swim.

To the boroughs of Killie these spouters repair,
These boroughs long tended with Bouverie's care,
And meetings were held, with professions so queer,
That simple ones thought the millenium was near.

A bard was selected, to witness the fun,
And tell the great deeds that the heroes had done;
Thus a terrible task has the bard of the day,
For Europe looks on at the laughable fray.

Now speeches as thick as grape shot in a battle,
Among the constituents furious rattle;
Each vowed he would gain the top rung of the ladder,
And made a noise loud as hard peas in a bladder.

Applause from the mob made the candidates splore,
No meetings ere heard such a "promising" core,
For each of the three told the glorious tale,
That when he got in he'd reform them wholesale.

Six speeches a piece wore the time well away,
When M'Ronald swore loud he would finish the fray,
He flourished his pick-axe, but Oh! sad to tell,
A coalpit was near, and down headlong he fell.

Then Robin, the gallant, fought hard to the end,
But who can with clearheaded voters contend?
And wearied with speaking, the bighearted soul,
Was killed like an ox by a stroke with the poll.

Then Chadwick rose up all so cautious and sage,
And said he'd continue the warfare to wage,
He would pile up Blue Books! *but the last ones took fire,*
Which proved this old gentleman's funeral pyre.

Then up rose the bard, with great wisdom inspired.
And gave in his verdict confoundedly tired;
"These boroughs can never be captured by force,
"And are not so insane as to sue for divorce."

These liberal boroughs are liberal still,
And Bouverie's the man who had worked with a will;
He has fought for us long—fought faithful and well,
So his be the boroughs, and mine be—farewell.

C.K.

Kilmarnock Standard, 14 November 1868.