

Classic Poetry Series

Allan Cunningham

- poems -

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Allan Cunningham(7 December 1784 - 30 October 1842)

a Scottish poet and author.

He was born at Keir, near Dalswinton, Dumfriesshire, and first worked as a stone mason's apprentice. His father was a neighbour of Robert Burns at Ellisland, and Allan with his brother James visited James Hogg, the "Ettrick shepherd", who became a friend to both. Cunninghams other brothers were the naval surgeon Peter Miller Cunningham (1789–1864) and the poet, Thomas Mounsey Cunningham (1776–1834).

Cunningham was apprenticed to a stonemason, but gave his leisure to reading and writing imitations of old Scottish ballads. Cunningham contributed some songs to Roche's Literary Recreations in 1807, and in 1809 he collected old ballads for Robert Hartley Cromek's Remains of Nithsdale and Galloway Song; he sent in, however, poems of his own, which the editor inserted, even though he may have suspected their real authorship. It gained for him the friendship of Walter Scott and Hogg.

In 1810 Cunningham went to London, where he worked as a parliamentary reporter and journalist till 1814, when he became clerk of the works in the studio of the sculptor, Francis Chantrey, a post he kept until Chantrey's death in 1841. Cunningham meanwhile continued to write, three novels, a life of Sir D. Wilkie, and Lives of Eminent British Painters, Sculptors, and Architects, besides many songs. His prose is often spoiled by its misplaced and too ambitious rhetoric; his verse also is ornate, and both are full of mannerisms, Some of his songs, however, hold a high place among British lyrics. A Wet Sheet and a Flowing Sea is one of the best British sea-songs, although written by a landsman; and many other of Cunningham's songs became popular. He also brought out an edition of Robert Burns' Works.

He was married to Jean Walker, who had been servant in a house where he lived, and they had five sons and one daughter, all of whom rose to important positions, and inherited in some degree his literary gifts. Among them were Joseph Davey Cunningham, Alexander Cunningham, Peter Cunningham and Francis Cunningham.

Hame, Hame, Hame

HAME, hame, hame, O hame fain wad I be--
O hame, hame, hame, to my ain countree!

When the flower is i' the bud and the leaf is on the tree,
The larks shall sing me hame in my ain countree;
Hame, hame, hame, O hame fain wad I be--
O hame, hame, hame, to my ain countree!

The green leaf o' loyaltie 's beginning for to fa',
The bonnie White Rose it is withering an' a';
But I'll water 't wi' the blude of usurping tyrannie,
An' green it will graw in my ain countree.

O, there 's nocht now frae ruin my country can save,
But the keys o' kind heaven, to open the grave;
That a' the noble martyrs wha died for loyaltie
May rise again an' fight for their ain countree.

The great now are gane, a' wha ventured to save,
The new grass is springing on the tap o' their grave;
But the sun through the mirk blinks blythe in my e'e,
'I'll shine on ye yet in your ain countree.'

Hame, hame, hame, O hame fain wad I be--
O hame, hame, hame, to my ain countree!

Allan Cunningham

Last Words

Gane were but the winter cauld,
And gane were but the snaw,
I could sleep in the wild woods,
Where primroses blaw.
Cauld's the snaw at my head,
And cauld at my feet,
And thy finger o' death's at my een
Closing them to sleep.
Let nane tell my father,
Or my mither sae dear:
I'll meet them baith in Heaven,
At the spring o' the year.

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A modern translation of this follows

GONE were but the winter cold,  
And gone were but the snow,  
I could sleep in the wild woods  
Where primroses blow.

Cold 's the snow at my head,  
And cold at my feet;  
And the finger of death 's at my e'en,  
Closing them to sleep.

Let none tell my father  
Or my mother so dear,--  
I'll meet them both in heaven  
At the spring of the year.

Allan Cunningham

# Sea Song

A wet sheet and a flowing sea,  
A wind that follows fast,  
And fills the white and rustling sail,  
And bends the gallant mast-  
And bends the gallant mast, my boys,  
While, like the eagle free,  
Away the good ship flies, and leaves  
Old England on the lee.

'O for a soft and gentle mind!'  
I heard a fair one cry;  
But give to me the snoring breeze  
And white waves heaving high-  
And white waves heaving high, my boys,  
The good ship tight and free;  
The world of waters is our home,  
And merry men are we.

There's tempest in yon hornèd moon,  
And lightning in yon cloud;  
And hark the music, mariners!  
The wind is piping loud-  
The wind is piping loud, my boys,  
The lightning flashing free;  
While the hollow oak our palace is,  
Our heritage the sea.

Allan Cunningham

# The Spring Of The Year

GONE were but the winter cold,  
               And gone were but the snow,  
 I could sleep in the wild woods  
               Where primroses blow.

Cold 's the snow at my head,  
                                   And cold at my feet;  
 And the finger of death 's at my e'en,  
                                   Closing them to sleep.

Let none tell my father  
                 Or my mother so dear,--  
 I'll meet them both in heaven  
                 At the spring of the year.

Allan Cunningham

# The Sun Rises Bright In France

THE sun rises bright in France,  
           And fair sets he;  
 But he has tint the blythe blink he had  
           In my ain countree.

O, it's nae my ain ruin  
       That saddens aye my e'e,  
 But the dear Marie I left behin'  
       Wi' sweet bairnies three.

My lanely hearth burn'd bonnie,  
                                   And smiled my ain Marie;  
 I've left a' my heart behin'  
                                   In my ain countree.

The bud comes back to summer,  
                                   And the blossom to the bee;  
 But I'll win back, O never,  
                                   To my ain countree.

O, I am leal to high Heaven,  
                                   Where soon I hope to be,  
 An' there I'll meet ye a' soon  
                                   Frae my ain countree!

Allan Cunningham