

**Classic Poetry Series**

**David McKee Wright**  
**- poems -**

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# David McKee Wright(6 August 1869 – 5 February 1928)

David McKee Wright was an Irish-born poet and journalist, active in New Zealand and Australia.

## <b>Early Life</b>

Wright was born in the town of Ballynaskeagh, County Down, Ireland, on 6 August 1869, the second son of William Wright, a Presbyterian missionary, and his wife, Annie McKee. His mother remained only briefly in Ireland following his birth and he was cared for by his grandmother, Rebecca McKee, until his parents returned from missionary work in Syria. Annie Wright died in 1877, shortly after the family had moved to London.

David was educated at the Glascar School, Ballynaskeagh, then at Pope's School, London, and the engineering section of the Crystal Palace School. Illness kept him at home for much of his youth; he read voraciously and began to compose poetry. He ran away from his family on three occasions, in part because of his unhappiness at his father's marriage, in September 1880, to Sophia Colyer Davison. The evangelical, scholarly and philanthropical tastes of his family also oppressed him and they mocked his aid interest in poetry. At the age of 17 Wright was diagnosed as having a spot on the lung and in 1887 was dispatched to New Zealand in hopes of a cure.

## <b>New Zealand</b>

In Christchurch Wright was briefly reunited with the family of his uncle, David McKee, and his grandmother, who had emigrated earlier. He then journeyed to the Aparima River and Lake Manapouri, and was employed as a shepherd at Puketoi station and later at Scobie Mackenzie's Hakataramea Valley Station. From 1890 he contributed verses and stories to the Otago Witness, and from 1892 to the Christchurch Press. He also attacked the Liberal government, and in particular the minister of lands and agriculture, John McKenzie, in political commentary and satirical prose and verse.

In 1895 Wright replied to critics of the Otago Witness 's practice of featuring local writers in an annual supplement: he attacked the view that 'no good thing can come out of New Zealand', and henceforth more strenuously asserted New Zealand themes in his writing. At the end of 1896 his story 'Mates: a tale of the

golden coast' won the Otago Witness Prize Competition, being the first of numerous major prizes to capture. Aorangi and other verses his first collection of poems, appeared in 1896, but was not well received.

At the beginning of 1897 Wright moved to Dunedin and enrolled as a student at the University of Otago. His academic results were barely adequate, but he was awarded the first Stuart Prize for poetry for the poem 'Queen Victoria, 1837 : 1897'. He failed to make a success of his studies for the Presbyterian ministry and at the end of his first year he took up outfield preaching at Alexandra and Clyde.

Wright's poetry flourished after the publication of Aorangi, and from April 1896 he produced a series of works for the Otago Witness. Twenty-four ballads were collected at the end of 1897 in the volume Station ballads and other favourable reception established Wright as a New Zealand poet rather than an Otago bard. The poems were characterised by good cheer and moral earnestness. Wright identified country life with manly virtue and womanly purity, and town existence with industrial strife, crime and effeminacy. His most bitter invective was directed at grasping station bosses, and at strikers, whom he generally portrayed as work-shy.

In 1898 Wright responded to a call to the Congregationalist Emmanuel Church in Oamaru, where his attacks on the moral pollution of the town aroused the hostility of some district worthies. He became prominent in the North Otago temperance movement and in the North Otago Christian Endeavour Union, being elected president in May 1899. He also campaigned against industrial evils, denouncing sweating in Oamaru and Dunedin. Wright was active in the founding of a branch of the British and Foreign Bible Society in Oamaru and became its chairman in February 1899.

David Wright's poetic output declined in his Oamaru period, although he composed and printed hymns for his congregation's use, and gave literary addresses. On 3 August 1899 he married Elizabeth Couper at Dunedin. She joined her husband's temperance advocacy and youth ministry.

Wright also attracted attention for his opposition to Britain's role in Africa and to New Zealand's rush to join the South African war (1899--1902). By the end of 1899 his church's membership had waned to 37. The Congregational Union of New Zealand decided to discontinue services in Oamaru in 1900 and Wright was moved to the parish of Newtown in Wellington. Before he left Oamaru, Wright published Wisps of Tussock. Several of the 'Tussock and asphalt rhymes' from the Otago Witness gave the book its backblocks flavour, but Wright had by now

turned from an interest in writing such hymns to rural labour and sights and directed his energies to lyric and satiric verse.

In Wellington Wright submitted work to the 'Free Lance' and other papers. His poem 'Wellington' was printed in gilt and black lettering on the glass sliding doors of two of the city's trams for many years. He was now beset by money troubles, particularly after the birth of his son on 15 September 1900, and he resigned his pastorate early in 1901. Temperamental differences between him and his wife contributed to his troubles. In May 1901 he took up the Nelson pastorate and continued as minister for four years, until he broke with the Congregational Union over its attempt to secure unanimous support for no-licence. He still advocated temperance, but believed that the choice was up to the individual.

From this time Wright stepped up his lecturing activities and free-lance journalism. In 1906 he bought an old press and began to print a weekly paper, the Nelson Times, producing 12 issues before August 1906, when he merged it in a new journal, Te Rauparaha ; the paper had 'strong Labor leanings'. In December 1906 the first of Wright's contributions appeared in the Sydney Bulletin under the name 'Maori Mac'. His poems were included in an Australasian anthology in 1905, and in W. F. Alexander and A. E. Currie's 1906 'New Zealand verse anthology'. In 1907 he began to write regularly for the New Zealand Mail. His Bulletin appearances increased, and he freelanced for the Dominion in Wellington. These undertakings were welcome at a time when he was struggling financially. The winning of a £25 prize offered by the Australasian Traveller 's annual publication 'Australia Today' did little to stave off bankruptcy.

When Wright returned to Nelson at the end of 1907 his family's belongings were seized and his library and furniture sold. He took a lease on Crown land in the Baton valley, south of Motueka, where he cleared a patch and erected a cabin. Elizabeth Wright refused to live there. Wright returned to free-lance writing in Nelson, while Elizabeth taught woodcarving to support the family.

### **<b> Australia</b>**

In 1910 Wright moved to Sydney. His contributions to the Bulletin increased, and he also wrote for the Sun and Sydney Mail , and free-lanced for Fairplay , a sporting weekly dedicated to defence of the liquor trade. By late 1914 he was editor of Fairplay , and by 1916 of the Red Page of the Bulletin. Most of these contributions were anonymous, particularly while he worked for the more conservative Bulletin. Wright's only collection of verse published in Australia, An Irish heart, was released in 1918 to critical acclaim. The advocates of literary nationalism attacked his conservative poetic and editorial practice, and he

became embroiled in controversy over his editing of Henry Lawson.

Efforts to bring about reconciliation between Wright and his wife failed, and from 1913 to 1918 he lived with Beatrice Florence Osborn; they had four sons before he broke with her to live with the poet and actress Zora Cross. They had two daughters. In 1926 Wright's health declined. He resigned from the Bulletin and attempted to win an income from the Australian Worker , for which he wrote copiously until his death on 5 February 1928 of a heart attack at Glenbrook, in the Blue Mountains of New South Wales, Australia.

# Amelia Jane

In the lands away beyond the sea, where Khan and Sultan rule,  
Where they drink their coffee thick and black, and sip the sherbet cool,  
They have white Circassian girls for slaves, as well as the Negro black;  
And it seems to me in our free land that slavery's coming back:  
It's fenced about with custom and law, and they give it a prettier name.  
But, spite of the paltry wage that's paid, it's slavery all the same.

In a handsome home in a stately town is worthy Mrs MacFee,  
Chairwoman known of a Christian guild, for a noble dame is she:  
Her doors are open to strangers all who call and leave their card;  
But Amelia Jane, who left last week, declares the place was hard.  
Surely Amelia Jane was wrong: she should have been happy to stay,  
For she's only hanging around the town looking for work today.

Such a good woman is Mrs MacFee, toiling with voice and hand  
In the cause of the poor little Indian girls away in a distant land;  
Such a good woman is Mrs MacFee, for hers is an open door,  
And her name's at the top of the charity list for the wives of the drunken poor.  
But Amelia Jane has a hungry look, with hollows under the eyes:  
She says she was starved, but everyone knows that Amelia Jane tells lies.

Such a good woman is Mrs MacFee, she has family prayers at night,  
And she loves, she says, to make the lives of her poorer sisters bright.  
Amelia Jane has a hardened heart: she talks of her weary feet,  
And says that, in spite of all the prayers, she had never enough to eat.  
It was hard to join the chorused words of 'Give us our daily bread',  
And, after washing the dishes up, to stagger hungry to bed.

Once in the week Amelia Jane got out for an hour or two,  
Once in a fortnight went to church with another slave she knew.  
She never had time to read a book, and the changeless mill went round,  
And nobody knew how she ached at night while body and soul were ground.  
But these are the lies of Amelia Jane, and it's wrong to set them down,  
For everyone knows that Mrs MacFee is the kindest woman in town.

Silly and light is Amelia Jane: she has no ideas of her own;  
You never would think her the bright little girl that you once on a time had  
known.  
She was clever enough when she went to school; she was pretty enough in her

way;

She hasn't improved, her schoolmates think, when they met her in town today:  
And it's all her fault, for, whatever the cause, I am sure that Mrs MacFee  
Is a model mistress in every way, and with that you will all agree.

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Where they drink their coffee thick and black, and sip the sherbet cool,  
They have white Circassian girls for slaves, as well as the Negro black;  
And it seems to me in our free land that slavery's coming back:  
It's fenced about with custom and law, and they give it a prettier name.  
But, spite of the paltry wage that's paid, it's slavery all the same.

David McKee Wright

# An Old Colonist's Reverie

Dustily over the highway pipes the loud nor'-wester at morn,  
Wind and the rising sun, and waving tussock and corn;  
It brings to me days gone by when first in my ears it rang,  
The wind is the voice of my home, and I think of the songs it sang  
When, fresh from the desk and ledger, I crossed the long leagues of sea --  
"The old worn world is gone and the new bright world is free."

The wide, wild pastures of old are fading and passing away,  
All over the plain are the homes of the men who have come to stay --  
I sigh for the good old days in the station whare again;  
But the good new days are better -- I would not be heard to complain;  
It is only the wind that cries with tears in its voice to me  
Of the dead men low in the mould who came with me over the sea.

Some of them down in the city under the marble are laid,  
Some on the bare hillside in the mound by the lone tree shade,  
And some in the forest deeps of the west in their silence lie,  
With the dark pine curtain above shutting out the blue of the sky.

And many have passed from my sight, whither I never shall know,  
Swept away in the rushing river or caught in the mountain snow;  
All the old hands are gone who came with me over the sea,  
But the land that we made our own is the same bright land to me.

There are dreams in the gold of the kowhai, and when ratas are breaking  
                   in bloom  
 I can hear the rich murmur of voices in the deeps of the fern-shadowed gloom.  
 Old memory may bring me her treasures from the land of the blossoms of May,  
 But to me the hill daisies are dearer and the gorse on the river bed grey;  
 While the mists on the high hilltops curling, the dawn-haunted  
                   haze of the sea,  
 To my fancy are bridal veils lifting from the face of the land of the free.

The speargrass and cabbage trees yonder, the honey-belled flax in its bloom,  
The dark of the bush on the sidings, the snow-crested mountains that loom  
Golden and grey in the sunlight, far up in the cloud-fringed blue,  
Are the threads with old memory weaving and the line of my life  
     running through;  
And the wind of the morning calling has ever a song for me



Of hope for the land of the dawning in the golden years to be.

David McKee Wright

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David McKee Wright

# And Wilt Thou Leave Me Thus?

And wilt thou leave me thus?  
Say nay, say nay, for shame,  
To save thee from the blame  
Of all my grief and grame;  
And wilt thou leave me thus?  
Say nay, say nay!

And wilt thou leave me thus,  
That hath loved thee so long  
In wealth and woe among?  
And is thy heart so strong  
As for to leave me thus?  
Say nay, say nay!

And wilt thou leave me thus,  
That hath given thee my heart  
Never for to depart,  
Nother for pain nor smart;  
And wilt thou leave me thus?  
Say nay, say nay!

And wilt thou leave me thus  
And have no more pity  
Of him that loveth thee?  
Hélas, thy cruelty!  
And wilt thou leave me thus?  
Say nay, say nay!

David McKee Wright

# Bavarian Gentias

Not every man has gentians in his house  
in soft September, at slow, sad Michaelmas.  
Bavarian gentians, big and dark, only dark  
darkening the daytime, torch-like, with the smoking blueness of Pluto's  
gloom,  
ribbed and torch-like, with their blaze of darkness spread blue  
down flattening into points, flattened under the sweep of white day  
torch-flower of the blue-smoking darkness, Pluto's dark-blue daze,  
black lamps from the halls of Dis, burning dark blue,  
giving off darkness, blue darkness, as Demeter's pale lamps give off blight, lead  
me then, lead the way.

Reach me a gentian, give me a torch!  
let me guide myself with the blue, forked torch of this flower  
down the darker and darker stairs, where blue is darkened on blueness even  
where Persephone goes, just now, from the frosted September  
to the sightless realm where darkness is awake upon the dark  
and Persephone herself is but a voice  
or a darkness invisible enfolded in the deeper dark  
of the arms Plutonic, and pierced with the passion of dense gloom, among the  
splendor of torches of darkness, shedding darkness on the lost bride and her  
groom.

David McKee Wright

# Forget Not Yet The Tried Intent

Forget not yet the tried intent  
Of such a truth as I have meant;  
My great travail so gladly spent,  
Forget not yet.

Forget not yet when first began  
The weary life ye know, since when  
The suit, the service, none tell can;  
Forget not yet.

Forget not yet the great assays,  
The cruel wrong, the scornful ways;  
The painful patience in denays,  
Forget not yet.

Forget not yet, forget not this,  
How long ago hath been and is  
The mind that never meant amiss;  
Forget not yet.

Forget not then thine own approved,  
The which so long hath thee so loved,  
Whose steadfast faith yet never moved;  
Forget not this.

David McKee Wright

# Hector

He strode across the schoolroom in July,  
Great Hector, clanging in his brazen mail;  
And all the cringing Greeks, with faces pale,  
Creaked into jabbering Ks and turned to fly.  
Achilles, safe because he could not die,  
Cheated and won; and all the lines grew stale.  
The life was gone from out the shabby tale;  
And back in Homer's teeth we flung the lie.

We fought for Troy behind a mossy wall;  
We burned the Grecian ships below a tree . . .  
Ah, that great war was forty years ago !  
Yet still I know that Hector did not fall;  
For when the bell rang truce to friend and foe,  
Achilles, lying Greek, was under me!

David McKee Wright

# I Abide And Abide And Better Abide

I abide and abide and better abide,  
And after the old proverb, the happy day;  
And ever my lady to me doth say,  
'Let me alone and I will provide.'  
I abide and abide and tarry the tide,  
And with abiding speed well ye may.  
Thus do I abide I wot alway,  
Nother obtaining nor yet denied.  
Ay me! this long abiding  
Seemeth to me, as who sayeth,  
A prolonging of a dying death,  
Or a refusing of a desir'd thing.  
Much were it better for to be plain  
Than to say 'abide' and yet shall not obtain.

David McKee Wright



# I Find No Peace

I find no peace, and all my war is done.  
I fear and hope. I burn and freeze like ice.  
I fly above the wind, yet can I not arise;  
And nought I have, and all the world I season.  
That loseth nor locketh holdeth me in prison  
And holdeth me not-yet can I scape no wise-  
Nor letteth me live nor die at my device,  
And yet of death it giveth me occasion.  
Without eyen I see, and without tongue I plain.  
I desire to perish, and yet I ask health.  
I love another, and thus I hate myself.  
I feed me in sorrow and laugh in all my pain;  
Likewise displeaseth me both life and death,  
And my delight is causer of this strife.

David McKee Wright

# In Spain

Tagus, farewell! that westward with thy streams  
Turns up the grains of gold already tried  
With spur and sail, for I go seek the Thames  
Gainward the sun that shewth her wealthy pride,  
And to the town which Brutus sought by dreams,  
Like bended moon doth lend her lusty side.  
My king, my country, alone for whome I live,  
Of mighty love the wings for this me give.

David McKee Wright

# In The Moonlight

The moon is bright, and the winds are laid, and the river is roaring by;  
Orion swings, with his belted lights low down in the western sky;  
North and south from the mountain gorge to the heart of the silver plain  
There's many an eye will see no sleep till the east grows bright again;  
There's many a hand will toil to-night, from the centre down to the sea;  
And I'm far from the men I used to know—and my love is far from me.

Where the broad flood eddies the dredge is moored to the beach of shingle white,

And the straining cable whips the stream in a spray of silver light;  
The groaning buckets bear their load, and the engine throbs away,  
And the wash pours red on the turning screen that knows not night or day;  
For there's many an ounce of gold to save, from the gorge to the shining sea—  
And there's many a league of the bare brown hills between my love and me.

Where the lines of gorse are parched and dry, and the sheaves are small and thin,

The engine beats and the combine sings to the drays that are leading in,  
For they're thrashing out of the stook to-night, and the plain is as bright as day,  
And the fork-tines flash as the sheaves are turned on the frame of the one-horse dray;  
For many a hand will toil to-night, from the mountains down to the sea;—  
But I'm far from the lips of the girl I love, and the heart that beats for me.

The trappers are out on the hills to-night, and the sickly lantern-shine  
Is mocking the gleam of the silver moon in the scrub on the long trap-line;  
The tallies are big on the rock-strewn spur, and the rattling clink of the chain  
Comes weirdly mixed from the moon-bright hill with the whistling shriek of pain;  
For many a hand will toil to-night where the tussocks are waving free;—  
But it's over the hills and over the plain to the heart that beats for me.

The stars are bright, and the night is still, and the river is singing by,  
And many a face is upward turned to gaze at the moon's bright eye.  
North and south, from the forest deeps to the heart of the silver plain,  
There's many an eye will see no sleep till the east grows bright again;  
There's many a hand will toil to-night by shining land and sea.  
O moonlight, bear my message of love to the heart that beats for me.



# Is It Possible?

Is it possible  
That so high debate,  
So sharp, so sore, and of such rate,  
Should end so soon and was begun so late?  
Is it possible?

Is it possible  
So cruel intent,  
So hasty heat and so soon spent,  
From love to hate, and thence for to relent?  
Is it possible?

Is it possible  
That any may find  
Within one heart so diverse mind,  
To change or turn as weather and wind?  
Is it possible?

Is it possible  
To spy it in an eye  
That turns as oft as chance on die,  
The truth whereof can any try?  
Is it possible?

It is possible  
For to turn so oft,  
To bring that lowest which was most aloft,  
And to fall highest yet to light soft:  
It is possible.

All is possible  
Whoso list believe.  
Trust therefore first, and after preve,  
As men wed ladies by licence and leave.  
All is possible.

David McKee Wright

# Madam, Withouten Many Words

Madam, withouten many words  
Once I am sure ye will or no ...  
And if ye will, then leave your bourds  
And use your wit and show it so,  
And with a beck ye shall me call;  
And if of one that burneth alway  
Ye have any pity at all,  
Answer him fair with & {.} or nay.  
If it be &, {.} I shall be fain;  
If it be nay, friends as before;  
Ye shall another man obtain,  
And I mine own and yours no more.

David McKee Wright

# Mine Own John Poynz

Mine own John Poynz, since ye delight to know  
The cause why that homeward I me draw,  
And flee the press of courts, whereso they go,  
Rather than to live thrall under the awe  
Of lordly looks, wrappèd within my cloak,  
To will and lust learning to set a law:  
It is not for because I scorn or mock  
The power of them, to whom fortune hath lent  
Charge over us, of right, to strike the stroke.  
But true it is that I have always meant  
Less to esteem them than the common sort,  
Of outward things that judge in their intent  
Without regard what doth inward resort.  
I grant sometime that of glory the fire  
Doth twyche my heart. Me list not to report  
Blame by honour, and honour to desire.  
But how may I this honour now attain,  
That cannot dye the colour black a liar?  
My Poynz, I cannot from me tune to feign,  
To cloak the truth for praise without desert  
Of them that list all vice for to retain.  
I cannot honour them that sets their part  
With Venus and Bacchus all their life long;  
Nor hold my peace of them although I smart.  
I cannot crouch nor kneel to do so great a wrong,  
To worship them, like God on earth alone,  
That are as wolves these sely lambs among.  
I cannot with my word complain and moan,  
And suffer nought, nor smart without complaint,  
Nor turn the word that from my mouth is gone.  
I cannot speak and look like a saint,  
Use willes for wit, and make deceit a pleasure,  
And call craft counsel, for profit still to paint.  
I cannot wrest the law to fill the coffer  
With innocent blood to feed myself fat,  
And do most hurt where most help I offer.  
I am not he that can allow the state  
Of him Caesar, and damn Cato to die,  
That with his death did scape out of the gate

From Caesar's hands (if Livy do not lie)  
And would not live where liberty was lost;  
So did his heart the common weal apply.  
I am not he such eloquence to boast  
To make the crow singing as the swan;  
Nor call the liond of cowardes beasts the most  
That cannot take a mouse as the cat can;  
And he that dieth for hunger of the gold  
Call him Alexander; and say that Pan  
Passeth Apollo in music many fold;  
Praise Sir Thopias for a noble tale,  
And scorn the story that the Knight told;  
Praise him for counsel that is drunk of ale;  
Grin when he laugheth that beareth all the sway,  
Frown when he frowneth and groan when is pale;  
On others' lust to hang both night and day:  
None of these points would ever frame in me.  
My wit is nought-I cannot learn the way.  
And much the less of things that greater be,  
That asken help of colours of device  
To join the mean with each extremity,  
With the nearest virtue to cloak alway the vice;  
And as to purpose, likewise it shall fall  
To press the virtue that it may not rise;  
As drunkenness good fellowship to call;  
The friendly foe with his double face  
Say he is gentle and courteous therewithal;  
And say that favel hath a goodly grace  
In eloquence; and cruelty to name  
Zeal of justice and change in time and place;  
And he that suffer'th offence without blame  
Call him pitiful; and him true and plain  
That raileth reckless to every man's shame.  
Say he is rude that cannot lie and feign;  
The lecher a lover; and tyranny  
To be the right of a prince's reign.  
I cannot, I; no, no, it will not be!  
This is the cause that I could never yet  
Hang on their sleeves that way, as thou mayst see,  
A chip of chance more than a pound of wit.  
This maketh me at home to hunt and to hawk,  
And in foul weather at my book to sit;



In frost and snow then with my bow to stalk;  
No man doth mark whereso I ride or go:  
In lusty leas at liberty I walk.  
And of these news I feel nor weal nor woe,  
Save that a clog doth hang yet at my heel.  
No force for that, for it is ordered so,  
That I may leap both hedge and dyke full well.  
I am not now in France to judge the wine,  
With saffry sauce the delicates to feel;  
Nor yet in Spain, where one must him incline  
Rather than to be, outwardly to seem:  
I meddle not with wits that be so fine.  
Nor Flanders' cheer letteth not my sight to deem  
Of black and white; nor taketh my wit away  
With beastliness; they beasts do so esteem.  
Nor I am not where Christ is given in prey  
For money, poison, and treason at Rome-  
A common practice used night and day:  
But here I am in Kent and Christendom  
Among the Muses where I read and rhyme;  
Where if thou list, my Poinz, for to come,  
Thou shalt be judge how I do spend my time.

David McKee Wright

# My Galley, Chargèd With Forgetfulness

My galley, chargèd with forgetfulness,  
Thorough sharp seas in winter nights doth pass  
'Tween rock and rock; and eke mine en'my, alas,  
That is my lord, steereth with cruelty;  
And every owre a thought in readiness,  
As though that death were light in such a case.  
An endless wind doth tear the sail apace  
Of forced sighs and trusty fearfulness.  
A rain of tears, a cloud of dark disdain,  
Hath done the weared cords great hinderance;  
Wreathèd with error and eke with ignorance.  
The stars be hid that led me to this pain;  
Drownèd is Reason that should me comfort,  
And I remain despairing of the port.

David McKee Wright

# My Lute Awake

My lute awake! perform the last  
Labour that thou and I shall waste,  
And end that I have now begun;  
For when this song is sung and past,  
My lute be still, for I have done.

As to be heard where ear is none,  
As lead to grave in marble stone,  
My song may pierce her heart as soon;  
Should we then sigh or sing or moan?  
No, no, my lute, for I have done.

The rocks do not so cruelly  
Repulse the waves continually,  
As she my suit and affection;  
So that I am past remedy,  
Whereby my lute and I have done.

Proud of the spoil that thou hast got  
Of simple hearts thorough Love's shot,  
By whom, unkind, thou hast them won,  
Think not he hath his bow forgot,  
Although my lute and I have done.

Vengeance shall fall on thy disdain  
That makest but game on earnest pain.  
Think not alone under the sun  
Unquit to cause thy lovers plain,  
Although my lute and I have done.

Perchance thee lie wethered and old  
The winter nights that are so cold,  
Plaining in vain unto the moon;  
Thy wishes then dare not be told;  
Care then who list, for I have done.

And then may chance thee to repent  
The time that thou hast lost and spent  
To cause thy lovers sigh and swoon;

Then shalt thou know beauty but lent,  
And wish and want as I have done.

Now cease, my lute; this is the last  
Labour that thou and I shall waste,  
And ended is that we begun.  
Now is this song both sung and past:  
My lute be still, for I have done.

David McKee Wright

# Of The Mean And Sure Estate

My mother's maids, when they did sew and spin,  
They sang sometime a song of the field mouse,  
That, for because her livelihood was but thin,

Would needs go seek her townish sister's house.  
She thought herself endured too much pain;  
The stormy blasts her cave so sore did souse

That when the furrows swimmèd with the rain,  
She must lie cold and wet in sorry plight;  
And worse than that, bare meat there did remain

To comfort her when she her house had dight;  
Sometime a barley corn; sometime a bean;  
For which she laboured hard both day and night

In harvest time whilst she might go and glean;  
And where store was stroyèd with the flood,  
Then well away! for she undone was clean.

Then was she fain to take instead of food  
Sleep, if she might, her hunger to beguile.  
'My sister,' quod she, 'hath a living good,

And hence from me she dwelleth not a mile.  
In cold and storm she lieth warm and dry  
In bed of down; the dirt doth not defile

Her tender foot, she laboureth not as I.  
Richly she feedeth and at the richman's cost,  
And for her meat she needs not crave nor cry.

By sea, by land, of the delicates, the most  
Her cater seeks, and spareth for no peril.  
She feedeth on boiled bacon meet and roast,

And hath thereof neither charge nor travail;  
And when she list, the liquor of the grape  
Doth glad her heart till that her belly swell.'

And at this journey she maketh but a jape;  
So forth she goeth, trusting of all this wealth  
With her sister her part so for to shape,

That if she might keep herself in health,  
To live a lady while her life doth last.  
And to the door now is she come by stealth,

And with her foot anon she scrapeth full fast.  
Th' other for fear durst not well scarce appear,  
Of every noise so was the wretch aghast.

At last she askèd softly who was there.  
And in her language, as well as she could,  
'Peep!' quod the other. 'Sister, I am here.'

'Peace,' quod the towny mouse, 'why speakest thou so loud?'  
And by the hand she took her fair and well.  
'Welcome,' quod she, 'my sister, by the Rood!'

She feasted her, that joy it was to tell  
The fare they had; they drank the wine so clear,  
And as to purpose now and then it fell,

She cheerèd her with 'How, sister, what cheer!'  
Amids this joy befell a sorry chance,  
That, well away! the stranger bought full dear

The fare she had, for, as she look askance,  
Under a stool she spied two steaming eyes  
In a round head with sharp ears. In France

Was never mouse so fear'd, for the unwise  
Had not i-seen such a beast before,  
Yet had nature taught her after her guise

To know her foe and dread him evermore.  
The towny mouse fled, she know whither to go;  
Th' other had no shift, but wonders sore

Feard of her life. At home she wished her tho,

And to the door, alas! as she did skip,  
The Heaven it would, lo! and eke her chance was so,

At the threshold her silly foot did trip;  
And ere she might recover it again,  
The traitor cat had caught her by the hip,

And made her there against her will remain,  
That had forgotten her poor surety and rest  
For seeming wealth wherein she thought to reign.

Alas, my Poynz, how men do seek the best  
And find the worst, by error as they stray!  
And no marvail; when sight is so opprest.

And blind the guide; anon out of the way  
Goeth guide and all in seeking quiet life.  
O wretched minds, there is no gold that may

Grant that ye seek; no war, no peace, no strife.  
No, no, although thy head were hooped with gold,  
Sergeant with mace, hawbert, sword, nor knife,

Cannot repulse the care that follow should.  
Each kind of life hath with him his disease.  
Live in delight even as thy lust would,

And thou shalt find, when lust doth most thee please,  
It irketh straight and by itself doth fade.  
A small thing it is that may thy mind appease.

None of ye all there is that is so mad  
To seek grapes upon brambles or breres;  
Nor none, I trow, that hath his wit so bad

To set his hay for conies over rivers,  
Ne ye set not a drag-net for an hare;  
And yet the thing that most is your desire

Ye do mis-seek with more travail and care.  
Make plain thine heart, that it be not knotted  
With hope or dread, and see thy will be bare

From all affects, whom vice hath ever spotted.  
Thyself content with that is thee assigned,  
And use it well that is to thee allotted.

Then seek no more out of thyself to find  
The thing that thou hast sought so long before,  
For thou shalt feel it sitting in thy mind.

Mad, if ye list to continue your sore,  
Let present pass and gape on time to come,  
And deep yourself in travail more and more.

Henceforth, my Poynz, this shall be all and some,  
These wretched fools shall have nought else of me;  
But to the great God and to his high doom,

None other pain pray I for them to be,  
But when the rage doth lead them from the right,  
That, looking backward, Virtue they may see,

Even as she is, so goodly fair and bright;  
And whilst they clasp their lusts in arms across,  
Grant them, good Lord, as Thou mayst of Thy might  
To fret inward for losing such a loss.

David McKee Wright



# Old Mates

I came up to-night to the station, the tramp had been longish and cold,  
My swag ain't too heavy to carry, but then I begin to get old.  
I came through this way to the diggings -- how long will that be ago now?  
Thirty years! how the country has altered, and miles of it under the plough,  
And Jack was my mate on the journey -- we both run away from the sea;  
He's got on in the world and I haven't, and now he looks sideways on me.

We were mates, and that didn't mean jokers who meets for a year or a day,  
We meant to go jogging together the whole of the blooming long way.  
We slept with one blanket between us the night that we run from the port,  
There was nothing above us but heaven, yet we took it as jolly good sport.  
And now he's the boss of a station, and I'm -- well, the bloke that you see;  
For he had the luck and I hadn't, and now he looks sideways on me.

We pegged out a claim on the Dunstan, there used to be gold in them days,  
There's blokes that still sticks to the digging, but Lord only knows how it pays;  
For the country as far as I've seen it's as chock full of holes as a sieve  
With the Chinkies amullocking through it, and yet them coves manage to live.  
But when Jack took me to the cradle, the place was a wonder to see,  
We washed out a fortune between us, and now he looks sideways on me.

We both fell in love with one woman -- she worked in a pub for a spell;  
It ain't the best place for an angel, but angels ain't better than Nell;  
For she was as good as they make 'em and hadn't a notion of ill --  
It's long years and years since we parted, and seems I'm in love with her still!  
But Jack was the handsomest fellow -- I saw how the thing had to be;  
He got the best wife on the diggings, and now he looks sideways on me.

I left him, I just couldn't stand it -- I knew it was better to part;  
I couldn't look on at the wedding with a pain like a knife at my heart!  
I never said nothing to no one -- we didn't whack out all the gold;  
I wanted my mate to be happy without my own yarn being told.  
So I went to the coast by the steamer, and now I'm the bloke that you see;  
He told me to go to the wharè, it seems he looks sideways on me.

There's steps coming down to the wharè -- some other poor bloke on the road;  
'Taint nothing to him to get growled at, the boss ain't a bloke that he knowed.  
Too dark to make out who's a-coming -- he's crossing the plank at the creek;  
The years and the whisky are telling, my eyesight begins to get weak.

What's the odds? it ain't like me to whimper, and all that's gone by had to be,  
But the old times came crowding around me to see him look sideways on me.

What, Jack! Why, old man, you don't mean it? You didn't right know it was me?  
Well I'm altered -- it ain't for the better -- never mind, never mind, let it be.  
O mate, the long years since we parted -- there's a blooming great lump in my  
throat --

I ain't been as glad, mate, I tell you, since the time that we run from the boat.  
You ain't a bit altered -- you're crying -- why, Jack, don't be sorry for me,  
I'm that glad that I think I'll go cranky -- and I thought you looked sideways on  
me.

David McKee Wright

# Shearing's Coming

There's a sound of many voices in the camp and on the track,  
And letters coming up in shoals to stations at the back;  
And every boat that crosses from the sunny 'other side'  
Is bringing waves of shearers for the swelling of the tide.

For the shearing's coming round, boys, the shearing's coming round,  
And the stations of the mountains have begun to hear the sound.

They'll be talking up at Laghmor of the tallies that were shore,  
And the man who broke the record is remembered at Benmore;  
And the yarns of strikes and barneys will be told till all is blue,  
And the ringers and the bosses will be passed in long review.

For the shearing's coming round, boys, the shearing's coming round,  
And the stations of the mountains have begun to hear the sound.

The great Orari muster and the drafting of the men  
Like a mob of ewes and wethers will be surely told again;  
And a lot of heathen places that will rhyme with kangaroo  
Will be named along with ringers and the things that they can do.

For the shearing's coming round, boys, the shearing's coming round,  
And the stations of the mountains have begun to hear the sound.

At last the crowds will gather for the morning of the start,  
And the slowest of the jokers will be trying to look smart;  
And a few will get the bullet, and high hopes will have a fall,  
And the bloke that talks the loudest stands a show of looking small.

For the shearing's coming round, chaps, the shearing's coming round,  
And the voices of the workers have begun to swell the sound.

David McKee Wright

# Since So Ye Please To Hear Me Plain

Since so ye please to hear me plain,  
And that ye do rejoice my smart,  
Me list no lenger to remain  
To such as be so overthwart.

But cursed be that cruel heart  
Which hath procur'd a careless mind  
For me and mine unfeigned smart,  
And forceth me such faults to find.

More than too much I am assured  
Of thine intent, whereto to trust;  
A speedless proof I have endured,  
And now I leave it to them that lust.

David McKee Wright

# The Heart And Service

The heart and service to you proffer'd  
With right good will full honestly,  
Refuse it not, since it is offer'd,  
But take it to you gently.

And though it be a small present,  
Yet good, consider graciously  
The thought, the mind, and the intent  
Of him that loves you faithfully.

It were a thing of small effect  
To work my woe thus cruelly,  
For my good will to be abject:  
Therefore accept it lovingly.

Pain or travel, to run or ride,  
I undertake it pleasantly;  
Bid ye me go, and straight I glide  
At your commandement humbly.

Pain or pleasure, now may you plant  
Even which it please you steadfastly;  
Do which you list, I shall not want  
To be your servant secretly.

And since so much I do desire  
To be your own assuredly,  
For all my service and my hire  
Reward your servant liberally.

David McKee Wright

# The Long Love That In My Thought Doth Harbour

The longë love that in my thought doth harbour  
And in mine hert doth keep his residence,  
Into my face presseth with bold pretence  
And therein campeth, spreading his banner.  
She that me learneth to love and suffer  
And will that my trust and lustës negligence  
Be rayned by reason, shame, and reverence,  
With his hardiness taketh displeasure.  
Wherewithall unto the hert's forest he fleeth,  
Leaving his enterprise with pain and cry,  
And there him hideth and not appeareth.  
What may I do when my master feareth  
But in the field with him to live and die?  
For good is the life ending faithfully.

David McKee Wright

# They Flee From Me That Sometime Did Me Seek

They flee from me that sometime did me seek  
With naked foot, stalking in my chamber.  
I have seen them gentle, tame, and meek,  
That now are wild and do not remember  
That sometime they put themselves in danger  
To take bread at my hand; and now they range,  
Busily seeking with a continual change.

Thanked be fortune it hath been otherwise  
Twenty times better; but once in special,  
In thin array after a pleasant guise,  
When her loose gown from her shoulders did fall,  
And she me caught in her arms long and small;  
Therewithall sweetly did me kiss  
And softly said, 'dear heart, how like you this?'

It was no dream: I lay broad waking.  
But all is turned thorough my gentleness  
Into a strange fashion of forsaking;  
And I have leave to go of her goodness,  
And she also, to use newfangledness.  
But since that I so kindly am served  
I would fain know what she hath deserved.

David McKee Wright

# True Love At Last

The handsome and self-absorbed young man  
looked at the lovely and self-absorbed girl  
and thrilled.

The lovely and self-absorbed girl  
looked back at the handsome and self-absorbed young man  
and thrilled.

And in that thrill he felt:  
Her self-absorption is even as strong as mine.  
I must see if I can't break through it  
And absorb her in me.

And in that thrill she felt:  
His self-absorption is even stronger than mine!  
What fun, stronger than mine!  
I must see if I can't absorb this Samson of self-absorption.

So they simply adored one another  
and in the end  
they were both nervous wrecks, because  
in self-absorption and self-interest they were equally matched.

David McKee Wright



# Unstable Dream

Unstable dream, according to the place,  
Be steadfast once, or else at least be true.  
By tasted sweetness make me not to rue  
The sudden loss of thy false feignèd grace.  
By good respect in such a dangerous case  
Thou broughtest not her into this tossing mew  
But madest my sprite live, my care to renew,  
My body in tempest her succour to embrace.  
The body dead, the sprite had his desire,  
Painless was th'one, th'other in delight.  
Why then, alas, did it not keep it right,  
Returning, to leap into the fire?  
And where it was at wish, it could not remain,  
Such mocks of dreams they turn to deadly pain.

David McKee Wright

# What Needeth These Threnning Words And Wasted Wind?

What needeth these threnning words and wasted wind?

All this cannot make me restore my prey.

To rob your good, iwis, is not my mind,

Nor causeless your fair hand did I display.

Let love be judge or else whom next we meet

That may both hear what you and I can say:

She took from me an heart, and I a glove from her.

Let us see now if th'one be worth th'other.

David McKee Wright

# What Should I Say?

What should I say,  
Since faith is dead,  
And truth away  
From you is fled?  
Should I be led  
With doubleness?  
Nay, nay, mistress!

I promised you,  
And you promised me,  
To be as true  
As I would be.  
But since I see  
Your double heart,  
Farewell my part!

Though for to take  
It is not my mind,  
But to forsake  
[One so unkind]  
And as I find,  
So will I trust:  
Farewell, unjust!

Can ye say nay?  
But you said  
That I alway  
Should be obeyed?  
And thus betrayed  
Or that I wiste  
Farewell, unkissed.

David McKee Wright

# Whoso List To Hunt, I Know Where Is An Hind

Whoso list to hunt, I know where is an hind,  
But as for me, hélas, I may no more.  
The vain travail hath wearied me so sore,  
I am of them that farthest cometh behind.  
Yet may I by no means my wearied mind  
Draw from the deer, but as she fleeth afore  
Fainting I follow. I leave off therefore,  
Sithens in a net I seek to hold the wind.  
Who list her hunt, I put him out of doubt,  
As well as I may spend his time in vain.  
And graven with diamonds in letters plain  
There is written, her fair neck round about:  
Noli me tangere, for Caesar's I am,  
And wild for to hold, though I seem tame.

David McKee Wright

# Ye Old Mule

Ye old mule that think yourself so fair,  
Leave off with craft your beauty to repair,  
For it is true, without any fable,  
No man setteth more by riding in your saddle.  
Too much travail so do your train appair.

Ye old mule

With false savour though you deceive th'air,  
Whoso taste you shall well perceive your lair  
Savoureth somewhat of a Kappurs stable.

Ye old mule

Ye must now serve to market and to fair,  
All for the burden, for panniers a pair.  
For since gray hairs been powdered in your sable,  
The thing ye seek for, you must yourself enable  
To purchase it by payment and by prayer,  
Ye old mule.

David McKee Wright