

Classic Poetry Series

**William John Macquorn
Rankine
- poems -**

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William John Macquorn Rankine(1820 - 1872)

William J. Macquorn Rankine was born in Edinburgh on July 5th. He trained in the Edinburgh University as an engineer under Sir J. B. Macneill. He spent most of his schooling working on surveys, harbors and railroads. This training paid off, and at the age of 35 Rankine was appointed to the chair of civil engineering in Glasgow. He began to write, usually only subjects directly connected with his chair, but then branching out farther. He contributed weekly to the technical journals, such as *The Engineer*, and put out a series of textbooks on civil engineering, the steam-engine and other prime movers, etc. He also came to publish elaborate treatise called *Shipbuilding, Theoretical and Practical*. Rankine was also a prominent and enthusiastic leader of the volunteer movement from its beginning. He also wrote, composed and sung several humorous and patriotic songs and poetry, such as *The Three Foot Rule* and *They Never Shall have Gibraltar*. He was also the earliest of the three founders of the modern science of Thermodynamics wrote on of the first formal treatise on the subject. These and other of Rankine's writings have been extremely useful in the advancement and understanding of engineering and physics. Rankine died at Glasgow on the 24th of December.

The Mathematician In Love

I.

A mathematician fell madly in love
With a lady, young, handsome, and charming:
By angles and ratios harmonic he strove
Her curves and proportions all faultless to prove.
As he scrawled hieroglyphics alarming.

II.

He measured with care, from the ends of a base,
The arcs which her features subtended:
Then he framed transcendental equations, to trace
The flowing outlines of her figure and face,
And thought the result very splendid.

III.

He studied (since music has charms for the fair)
The theory of fiddles and whistles, --
Then composed, by acoustic equations, an air,
Which, when 'twas performed, made the lady's long hair
Stand on end, like a porcupine's bristles.

IV.

The lady loved dancing: -- he therefore applied,
To the polka and waltz, an equation;
But when to rotate on his axis he tried,
His centre of gravity swayed to one side,
And he fell, by the earth's gravitation.

V.

No doubts of the fate of his suit made him pause,

For he proved, to his own satisfaction,
That the fair one returned his affection; -- "because,
"As every one knows, by mechanical laws,
"Re-action is equal to action."

VI.

"Let x denote beauty, -- y , manners well-bred, --
" z , Fortune, -- (this last is essential), --
"Let L stand for love" -- our philosopher said, --
"Then L is a function of x , y , and z ,
"Of the kind which is known as potential."

VII.

"Now integrate L with respect to $d t$,
"(t Standing for time and persuasion);
"Then, between proper limits, 'tis easy to see,
"The definite integral Marriage must be: --
"(A very concise demonstration)."

VIII.

Said he -- "If the wandering course of the moon
"By Algebra can be predicted,
"The female affections must yield to it soon" --
-- But the lady ran off with a dashing dragoon,
And left him amazed and afflicted.

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The Three Foot Rule

When I was bound apprentice, and learned to use my hands,
Folk never talked of measures that came from foreign lands:
Now I'm a British Workman, too old to go to school;
So whether the chisel or file I hold, I'll stick to my three-foot rule.

Some talk of millimetres, and some of kilogrammes,
And some of decilitres, to measure beer and drams;
But I'm a British Workman, too old to go to school,
So by pounds I'll eat, and by quarts I'll drink, and I'll work by my three-foot rule.

A party of astronomers went measuring the earth,
And forty million metres they took to be its girth;
Five hundred million inches, though, go through from pole to pole;
So let's stick to inches, feet and yards, and the good old three-foot rule.

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