

NOTE by Don Gordon in Oct 2020: This elegy was written by Rev D Blair, Free Church Canada. It was penned almost 20 years after John's death and printed in 1855 in Glasgow by Robert Stark, 22 Gordon Street. It was reprinted in 'The Family of Allan MacMaster' by Leslie M McKinnon, Cronulla, 2012 - placed in the Gosford City Library, NSW. Rev Blair, who moved to Canada, was not personally acquainted with John and his knowledge of John was through Christian friends in Badenoch , a locality in which John was a teacher for several years. It appears that the elegy by Rev Blair was on the first two pages, and that someone else added some biographical details on the last page. What was it about John's life that prompted such a florid elegy almost two decades after he had died?

Appendix A.

ELEGY
ON THE DEATH OF
JOHN M'MASTER
SCHOOLMASTER, STORNAWAY

BY THE
REV. D. BLAIR
FREE CHURCH MINISTER
CANADA

The original was printed in Glasgow by Robert Stark, 22 Gordon Street. MDCCCLV

PREFACE

Well nigh twenty years have arrived, grown old, disappeared, and been enrolled among the past, since the subject of this Elegy has crossed the Boundary of Time and Eternity, and entered into that Heaven of peace and happiness which his longings and yearnings for, through life, guaranteed to him, as his portion and resting place at Death.

Time, the outer veil of the Eternity into which he has entered, flows swiftly; the mysterious river of Existence rushed on, oft has a new billow thereof arrived, with its loud mad eddyings; and lashing wildly as ever, over its old embankments, committed a lasting breach among those acquaintances of his, whose fond remembrance of him would lead them cordially to join the eulogistic strains of his graphic elegist.

Time, in its unimpeded flight, as if of its own accord, invests with an element of change whatsoever it has once embraced within its mysterious folds.

And this prominently distinguishable feature is no less visibly traceable in the progress and development of its smaller portions that of the grand whole; and even within the narrow range of one individual's acquaintance, each individual's history reveals, and demonstrates in explicit terms the reality of that fact.

Where now are those who, some fifty-years ago, accompanied through business, the duties, and the pleasures of life, him whose history we now trace through the dark Night of the Past? Vanished, all gone, and vanished from the theatre of Life.

Or, if indeed, here, and there, we still find a tottering old man – a monument of the Past, does not his very appearance, although still in the habiliments of life, loudly proclaim the reality of this change? – befooling the theories of those who would concentrate man's efforts and pleasures in the present, and, who, secularising his hopes, must ultimately destroy his happiness.

Or, where are those who, connected by the triple bands of relationship, acquaintanceship, or deeply sympathetic religious feeling, found pleasure in holding "sweet converse" with his in the home, and meeting-room, or the Church? Many have long since found rest beneath the yew tree; and many more, though not yet enveloped in the infinitude of the Sea of immensity, have been tossed by its foam and spray, and no longer worship the God of their Fathers in that

"Land of brown heath and shaggy wood,
Land of the mountain and the flood,
Land of their sires;"

but now in patriarchal attitude are joined in their daily devotions by families whose home is, and it may be, whose birth-place has been in the distant West – beside some meandering American rivulet – beneath the shade of some Canadian wood, whose depths re-eco still, the venerable language of old Scotland, – or in the more distant South, beneath a genial Australian sky.

Or, where now are those who in their youth received instruction from him in the School-room? Not many years have elapsed, but Time has ushered them from boyhood to manhood, and displayed a most profuse variety, in designing and accomplishing a manifest change in their destiny.

In that penultima Thule, where the days of his earthly course were ended, still stands the old School-room, little altered since he last entered it; beside it his dwelling-house wherein Death performed its part; there also, the Parish Church, on the gravelled walks, round which they romped and played, who, in that School-room, passed through the Apprenticeship to life – receiving the Elements of Knowledge, sacred and secular. But, where now are they? What their positions and prospects? A mighty current of omnipotent Time in its ascent to the altitudes of Futurity has, in their case, as it were, arrived at a comparatively level region, where this powerful devastator has more speedily, by its never ceasing suction, attracted into its mausoleum that which is ephemeral of Life and Existence, – these play-mates and school-mates have, in very deed and truth, disappeared, – scattered far and wide on the surface of this, our decaying globe, the living will be found. But where are the dead? We cannot trace them all, but this is sure "The sea, the deep lone sea" hath many.

All things grow old, and pass away, Scotland, England, the World, grow old and decay, and would decay, were they adamant, only slower; and thus shall they continue till this petty Islet of ours in which we dwell, and which we call Time shall totally overflow – till the breath of Omnipotence, shall have caused the last bellow to undulate o'er the uttermost point of present existence. When Time shall be no more, and all shall be Eternity.

Such is matter, and such is matter's destiny. Not so with man, his fate is different; he grows old and dies, but 'tis to live.

"He shall survive unscathed
Amidst the reek of Matter and the crash of Worlds."

The recollection of the righteous shall not cleave to the dust. During their lives they are lights, and after their death their Lives become lights to their successors, through which, as a little lamplit Pathway, which sheds its feeble twilight into the boundless dark of oblivion, we may still see those who are gone, where, though hidden, they are revealed, though dead they yet speak.

Thus it is that Biographies and Elegies become so many revocations of the edict of Destiny, so that time has not utterly, does not so very soon, have dominion over the memory of the dead.

With this aim (of retaining in the knowledge of the living, the memory of the dead) the present Elegy was originally written, and is now printed.

The writer, the Rev. Mr. Blair, now of Canada, was not personally acquainted with the subject, his knowledge of him being acquired through Christian friends in Badnenoeh, a locality in which Mr. M'Master for several years laboured as Teacher. Mr. Blair's delineation of his character, however, whilst more disinterested on that account, is not considered less correct, by parties who had the opportunity of enjoying personal acquaintance with Mr. M'Master.

He was born June 15th 1782, in the neighbourhood of Lochielhead, 13 miles east of Fort William. He was deprived of his mother when five, and his father when seven years of age. He had one sister who died in early life. Thus alone in the world, the battle of initiatory life was fought by him single-handed. He was self-supported and self-educated.

About the age of 17 his health was much impaired, and, in consequence, he was compelled to leave the South of Scotland, where he was then engaged, and return to the Highlands; where, through many difficulties he managed to acquire sufficient education to equip him as a Teacher, in which capacity he was employed first, in several districts in Lochaber, and afterwards, having made Teaching his profession for life, removed to Stornoway, a few miles South of Kingussie, where he remained for several years, until he removed to Stornoway, where, on February 20th 1837, he breathed his last.

His family were ten in number, two of whom died in childhood. The other eight, all of them still young, were, at his death, left in charge of a Christian mother, whose prudence in the management of his affairs during his life, was eclipsed only by her prudence after his death. As he lived, so he died, -- a Christian; and that sustaining power which Christianity alone can vouchsafe its believers, -- guided his path softly from this troublous life into a happy eternity. He felt he could hopefully pillow his head on the arms of the Omnipotence, and his widow and family be directed to that power which raiseth man above affliction; as with his dying voice he sang these lines --

Wait on the Lord, and be thou strong,
And He shall strength afford
Unto thine heart; yea, do thou wait,
I say, upon the lord.

(There follows many lines of Gaelic verse, which may have been composed by Mr. Blair)
