"HE YT THOLIS OUERCOMMIS"

THREE POEMS

wi a

PREAMBLE

in the

SCOTS TONGUE

June 1931.

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THE LANGUAGE o these three poems may be shortly described as the East-Side Edinburgh dialect, bit Ah hae a word or twa ti say anent language in general, an ma Edinburgh dialect in particular. Noo, it hiz aye appeared ti me that, gin ony Scottish speech wud be true an natural-like, it maun follow the same development in the individual as ony ither language ir dialect whatsoiver. Ony sort o hauf-educated buddy; ony man ir wummin, that is, wha hiz eneugh buik-learnin ti ettle efter writin somethin original, maun develop his language bi the same process, nae maitter whither he writes in Braid Scots ir in Standard English. This process, ti ma wey o thinkin, sterts richt awaw back when as bairns wi first ettle ti parrot the soons spoken bi the folk roon aboot iz. The basis o ony tongue, therefore, is yin o pronunciation; the wee bairn stammers oot his smaw speech in the accent o his ain fireside, the accent that will mair ir less bide in his speech ti the end o his days.

The words thirsels hae less importance than the accent in whilk they are spoken.

As the bairn grows in knowledge an in years, his min' gits filled wi new ideas that maun be expressed bi the general standard terminology, beciz the local maimer o speakin canny cope wi the situation. At the schull,
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forbye, the growin bairn maun read buiks written in Standard English, an gin he dizny happen ti hae been brocht up on standard weys o speakin, he will hae ti mak a stoot-herted, bit no ower successfy, attempt ti read thum the wae he is telt.

The later development o the speech o ony individ-
ual wha gaes aboot a bit, an reads onything that he
sein git a haud o, involves the assimilation o aw kins
o words an phrases, ivery yin o whilk, hooiver, is
altered bi contact wi his ain original accent. The
outcome o aw this is that a literary dialect maun bi
its ain nature contain words assimilated frae the
standard language and frae ither dialects, the hale
bein in a measure unified bi sein pronounced accordin
ti the original local accent o the individual. In
these three poems Ah hae therefore settled ti yase the
function o accent in a mairner worthy o the importance
whilk it posseses in this theory o dialect, bi writin
doone the words as Ah wud naiturally pronounce thum,
wi as muckle phonetic accuracy as is possible wi the
usual alphabetic characters.

The first poem describes a wee laddie's advent-
ure, frae a bairn's point o view, an in the dialect
o a wee Edinburgh keelie. Ah'll no say that it is juist the bonniest dialect that Ah hae heard, bit thayr ye are; Ah happened ti be brocht up on it, an had ti tak whit Ah got. The second yin belongs ti the transition period, in whilk the growin bairn is warsein awaw wi an unfamiliar accent, an maistly findin it a sair fecht. The third is written in the last stage o the process, when a buddy is free ti think fir himsel. It will be seen that the vocabulary is a wee bit mair varied nor that o the first wee poem, an that the ugly, staucherin glo' al stop hiz been dropped awthigither, fir sharely a man may hae as muckle discretion o his ain as practise speakin without that awfy-like soon.

In conclusion, Ah wad like ti apply this theory o dialect ti the question o Synthetic Scots. Ti ma wey o thinkin, the yin true an naitural Scottish literature maun follow the process described abuin, an the mair advantage it takes o the widenin o scope afforded bi the last stage, the richer a medium will it hae ti wark wi. Naethin, on theither haun, cud be mair artificial than ti gae ti a farmhoose wi a wee note-buik jottin doon the words as they tumble frae the lips o the farmer an his guid wife, an then studyin thum up at hame, an manufacturin a poem accordin ti the limitations o thir speech.
Shoat! here's the polis,
The Gayfield polis,
An they'll pi' iz in the nick fir playin fi'baw in the street:

Yin o thum's a faw'y
Like a muckle foazy taw'y
Bi' the ither's lang an skinny-like, wi umburrelly feet.

Och awaw, says Tammy Curtis,
Fir thir baith ower blate ti hurt iz,
Thir a glaikit pair o Teuchters, an as Heilant as a peat.

Shoat! thayr thir comin
Wi the hurdygurdy wummin
Tha' wi cowpit wi her puggy, playin fi'baw in the street.

Si wir aff bi Cocky-Dudgeons an the Sandies an the Cowp,
An wir ower a dizzen fences tha' the coppers canny loup,
An wir in an cot o backgreens, an wir dreepin muckle dikes,
An wir tear oor class on railins fuill o nesty irin spikes.

An aw the time the skinnylinky copper's a' oor heels;
Though the faw'y's deid ir deisin, this yin seems ti rin on wheels.
Noo hiz stickin on a railin wi hiz helmet on a spike,
Noo hiz up an ower an rinnin, did ye iver see the like?
Bi' wi stoor awaw ti Puddicky (tha's doon bi Logie Green)
An wir roon bi Beaverhaw, whayr deil a beaver's iver seen,
An wir aff wi bitts an stockins, an wir wadin roon a fence,
It sticks oo' inty the waw'er, bi' tha'z naethin if ye've sense;
Sine wi croodle doon thigither, jist like choockies wi a hen
In a bonny wee bit bunkie-hole tha' bobbies dimny ken.
Bi' ma knees is skinned an bleedin, an ma breaks they want a seat;
Loosh! ye git mair nor ye're eftir, playin fi'baw in the street.
Ah sit in a braw-built schuil
Wi braw-built Doric pillars above ma heid,
Bi' the buiks ah read
Are Attic-English, though sair fornenst ma will,
Fir ma teuch Scots tongue gaes cantier ower the rocks
O the clarty staucherin speech o ma Embro nurse
Than it diz wi the saft sweet sooch o an English verse —
Bi' the maister knocks
Wi the sair hard edge o his tawse on ma fingertips,
Sine he gars me mooth smooth verse wi ma Northern lips —

"Shades of the prison howse begin ti close
Upon the growin Boy
Bi' he beholds the light and whence it flows
He sees i' in hiz joy —"

"What's that he sees, young man?" the maister says:
"Itt, Sir." — the bluid burns dirlin in ma face —

Bi' the bell sterts ringin, ringin, an ah've guy suin fund ma feet
In a bonny stoory gu'er, playin fi'baw in the street.
The waves o the toon wallow in broons an blaes
Ower siven hills, yince bonny enough, nae doot;
They caw'd it Modern Athens in Ruskin's days
An cluttered the Calton Acropolis up wi loot,
Auld mowlit cannons captured the deil kens whayr,
An ugly yisless tank aw rust an scale;
Whayriver they fund an acre or twa ti spare
They biggit on't — a strang, bit daftlike jail,
A wheen roon huts fir gliffin at the stawrs —

Sine in yon public park
Whit di they day bit stick a bit o wark
Raxed frae the clean, cauld pagan art o Greece,
Pure, shapefy pillars, even here at peace
In aw this awfy wilderness, twalve nuns
Pure in thir true proportions, stand apairt
Frae aw yon birstlin fortalice o guns;
Apairt frae Burns's wee roon cotton pirn
(A pepperpat, some caw't) an Nelson's butter kirk.

Bit the thing that Ah canny mak oot at aw
As Ah stare at the hale clanjamphrey
Is the fact that it dizny offend me avaw
Sae noo ye'll jalous whayr Ah've cam frae.
Ah'm telt that Scotland's romance is deid
(Barrin the railway posters)

Bit Ah stand on an ugly bit handy irin brig
That loups abuin Halkerston's Wynd, whayr the station is noo,
Though Ah canny git leave ti stand fir the thrangs o folk
Bizzin aboot that way, ye'd think ye'd nae richt ti be here.
An ma lugs are deeven wi the din o electric caws,
Melled wi the din an the clatter o brewers' cairts,
The deid, hard dunt o an ill-shod wheel on the stanes,
An mixter-maxter tined in the hale stramash
The whizzin, reedy tune o an auld blin' man
Wha joggles wi yin o thae concerteeny things;
An whiles Ah hear an unco giren dirge
Scraped frae an auld cracked fiddle yince broken in twa,
Sine clappit thigither an tied wi a hantle o string.
He fiddles awaw wi a jouk o his sunbrunt pow;
Twa legs he hiz, bit yin o thum's made o wud,
An he fiddles an diddles awaw, day in, day oot,
Aye the same tune, A Man's a Man fir Aw That

An here Ah stand in the middle o sic a steer
Lowin an lowin wi pride, though Ah dinny ken why.
Ah can feel the rabble o lorries an beggars an dirt
Tak a grup o ma hert, though awmost without ma will:

Wi the swish o the tramway wires abuin ma heid
Oot frae the warld o machines Ah turn ma gaze
Through the reeky haze
O the Cannogate lums, ti whayr Erthur's sooty hill,
Like a lusty weed
Blawn ti a brewery yaird, grows green thayr still.
An somethin gars me ken in ma hert o herts
That the city mauna be judged bi her Calton rags,
Somethin that bides in the middle o buses an cairts,
In the roar o exhausts an the peace o the Castle Crags,
The noisy poo'r o the new an the might o the auld;
It's mebbe the changeless aowl o the helpless toon
Sturin ma hert, though guy sair hadden doon
Ti the stane an lime o a corp ower easy mauled,
The spirit o Embro that nae bad taste can kill,
Wi maun be proof o Modern Athens still.