



A Legend of the
Castle of Fiddes.

Drummy Cap:

BY

JOHN BURNES.

ABERDEEN: LEWIS SMITH & SON.

Sketch of the Author.



In a preface to an edition of the works of John Burness, dated Stonehaven, May 1819, the writer gives the following account of the author:—John Burness was the youngest son of William Burness, Farmer in Bogjordan, Parish of Glenbervie, and County of Kincardine. He was born on the 23rd of May, 1771. He lost both his parents before he had attained his thirteenth year, and never was hut one year at any school.

He served his apprenticeship to the haker business in Brechin, at which trade he worked till about the latter end of 1794, when he enlisted in the Angus Fencible Volunteer Corps of Infantry, then raising in Arbroath, and commanded by Major John Fraser of Balmadus. With this corps he was at Dumfries in the year 1796, where he got acquainted with his relation, Robert Burns. Here he wrote his tale of "Thrummy Cap," which was shown to Burns a little before his death. The corps to which the author was attached, subsequently went to Stranraer in Galloway where he wrote "Charles Montgomery." They afterwards embarked for the Shetland Isles, where "Rosmond and Isabella" was written.

Upon the disbanding of the corps at Peterhead, 1st April, 1799, he came to Stonehaven, where he commenced business for himself as a baker. Here he first published his "Charles Montgomery."

Matters not answering his expectations in Stonehaven, he gave up business, and engaged himself as a substitute in the Forfar Militia; and with them he continued till the 10th of June, 1815, when he was discharged at Naas, in the county of Kildare, Ireland, when he once more returned to Stonehaven and attempted the haker business, but was still unsuccessful.

The Author's fate was a sad one. In 1826 while engaged at his employment as a Book Canvasser, and probably selling his own publications, he was overtaken by a snow-storm near the Kirk of Portlethen and perished. He was buried in the Spital Cemetery, Aberdeen.

Burness was a second-cousin of Robert Burns, whose father, William Burness, was born near Stonehaven. The forefathers of the two poets are buried in the churchyard of Glenbervie, where a tombstone is erected to their memory.

Burness was best known as the author of "Thrummy Cap," but he had a very varied Muse, writing plays in blank verse and in prose; also tales, tragic and humorous; songs, etc. "Thrummy Cap" and "The Ghaist o' Garron Ha'" were his most popular works. Burns is said to have considered "Thrummy Cap" the best ghost story in the language.

THRUMMY CAP.

*“A Tale o’ the times that are past,
 The deeds o’ the day that are gane,
 Fan goblins, abroad i’ the blast,
 At midnight made horrible mane.
 Fan knowledge, in cloisters confin’d,
 Was kept by the clerical crew,
 The people, priest-ridden an’ blind,
 Believ’d sic absurdities true.”*

THE LAMB LEADER.

In ancient times, far in the north,
 A hunder miles ayont the Forth,
 Upon a stormy winter’s day,
 Twa men forgather’d by the way ;
 An’ as they had some piece to gang,
 To keep the time frae seeming lang,
 They did agree to gang thegither,
 As company to ane anither.
 Ane was a sturdy bardocho chiel,
 An’ frae the weather happit weel
 Wi’ a mill’d plaiden jockey coat ;
 An’ eke, he on his head had got
 A Thrummy Cap, bait large and stout,
 W’ flaps ahint (as weel’s a snout),
 Whilk buttoned close aneath his chin,
 To keep the cauld frae cummin’ in ;

Upon his legs, he had gamashes,
 Which sogers ca' their spatterdashes ;
 An' on his hands, instead o' glo'es,
 Large doddy mittens, whilk he'd roose
 For warmness ; an' an aiken stick,
 Nae very lang, but gey an' thick,
 Intil his neive, he drove awa,'
 An' car'd for neither frost nor sna.'
 The tither was just the reverse,
 O' claise an' courage baith was scarce ;
 Sae in our tale, as we go on,
 I think we'll ca' him Cow'rdly John,
 As he that spirit aft did show,
 As in the sequel you will know.
 Sae on they gaed at a guid scour,
 'Cause that they saw a gatherin' show'r
 Grow vera thick upo' the wind,
 Whilk to their wae they soon did find
 An awfu' show'r o' sna and drift,
 As ever dang down frae the lift.
 Right wild and monstrous Boreas roar'd,
 "Preserves !" quo John, "we'll baith be smoor'd,
 Our tryst's end we can ne'er mak out."
 "Cheer up," quo Thrummy, "never doubt ;
 But I'm some fley'd we've tint our way.
 Howe'er at the neist house we'll stay
 Until we see gin it grows fair ;
 Gin no, a' nicht we'll tarry there."
 "Weel, weel," says Johnny, "we sall try."
 Syne they a mansion-house did spy
 Upo' the road, a bit afore,
 Sae up they gaed unto the door,
 Whare Thrummy chappit wi' his stick,
 Syne to the door cam vera quick
 A muckle dog, wha barkit sair ;

But Thrummy for him didna care,
 But handled weel his aiken staff,
 In spite o' 's teeth he kept him aff
 Until the landlord cam to see
 An' ken what might the matter be.
 Whan vera soon the dog did cease,
 The landlord he did spier the case.
 Quo' Thrummy, "Sir, we hae gaen will,
 We thocht we'd ne'er a house get till ;
 We near were smoor'd amang the drift,
 An' sae, guidman, ye'll mak a shift
 To gie us quarters a' this night,
 For now we dinna hae day-light
 Farer to gang, though it were fair—
 Sae gin ye hae a bed to spare,
 Whate'er your charge we sanna grudge,
 An' satisfy you ere we budge
 To gang awa, and when it's day
 Will pack our awls an' tak our way."

The landlord says—"O' beds we've nane,
 Our ain fouk they will scarce contain ;
 But gin ye'll gang but twa miles forit,
 Aside the kirk dwalls Robbie Dorat,
 Wha keeps a change, an' sells guid drink.
 His house you may mak out, I think."

Quo' Thrummy—"That's owre far awa',
 The roads are sae blawn up wi' snaw,
 To mak it is nae in our power,
 For, look ye, sic a dismal shower
 Is comin' on : ye'll lat us bide,
 Though we sude sit at your fireside."
 The landlord says to him—"Na, na,
 I canna keep you here ava.
 Shamp aff, it is nae worth your while
 To bide, fan ye hae scrimp twa mile

To gang ; sae quickly aff ye'll steer
 For faith I doubt ye's nae be here."

"Twa miles," quo' Thrummy, "de'il speed me
 If frae your house this night I gae.
 Are we to starve in Christian land?
 As lang's my stick bides i' my hand,
 An' siller plenty i' my pouch,
 To nane about this house I'll crouch.
 Come, John, lat's in we'll tak a seat.
 Fat sorrow gars you look so blate?"
 Sae in he gaes an' sets him down,
 Says he—"There's nane about your toun
 Sall put me out till a new day,
 As lang's I've siller for to pay."

The landlord says—"Ye're rather rash,
 To turn you out we sanna fash
 Since ye're sae positive to bide,
 But troth ye'll sit by the fireside.
 I tauld you ance, o' beds I've nane
 Unoccupied, except bare ane ;
 In it, I dread, ye winna lie,
 For stoutish hearts ha'e aft been shy
 To venture e'en within the room
 After the night begins to gloom ;
 It's haunted by a frightfu' ghaist.
 Oursel's are terrified amaist
 To bide about the toun a' night ;
 Sae ye may chance to get a sight,
 Like that whilk some o' our folk saw ;
 Far better till ye gang away,
 Or else ye'll maybe rue ere day."
 "Guid faith," quo' John, "I'm thinkin' sae.
 Better until the neuk to sit
 Than fley'd, guid keeps ! out o' our wit.
 The Lord preserve me frae a' evil !

I wadna like to see the Devil.”
 “Whist, gouk,” quo Thrummy, “haud your peace,
 That sanna gar me leave this place ;
 To great or sma’ I ne’er did ill,
 Nae ghaist or de’il my rest shall spill.
 Landlord, gin ye’ll mak up that bed,
 I promise I’ll be vera glad
 Intil the same a’ night to lie,
 Gin that the room be warm an’ dry.”

The landlord says—“Ye’se get a fire
 An’ candle too, gin ye desire,
 Wi’ beuks to read, an’ for your bed
 I’ll orders gie to get it made.”

John says—“As I’m a Christian man,
 Wha never lik’d to curse nor ban,
 Nor steal nor lie, nor drink nor splore,
 I’ll never gang within the door,
 But stay by the fireside a’ night,
 An’ gang awa whene’er it’s light.”

Says Thrummy till him, wi’ a glower,
 “Ye cowardly gouk—I’ll mak ye cour !
 Come ye up stairs alang wi’ me,
 An’ I sall caution for you be,
 For I defy the muckle de’il
 An’ a’ his warks I wat fu’ weel.
 Fat tarry then maks you sae eery ?
 Fling by your fears and come be cheery.”
 Syne Johnny faintly gae consent,
 An’ up the stairs they quickly went,
 Where soon they gat baith fire an’ light
 To keep them hearty a’ the night.
 The landlord likewise gae them meat
 As muckle as they weel could eat,
 Shaw’d them their bed, and bade them gang
 Till it whene’er they did think lang.

Sae wishin' them a good repose,
Straight then to his ain bed he goes.

Our travellers now being left alane,
'Cause that the frost was nippin' keen,
Coost aff their shoon an' warm't their feet,
An' syne gaed to their bed to sleep ;
But cowardly John wi' fear was quakin',
He couldna sleep but lay still wakin',
Sae troubled wi' his panic fright.
Whan near the twalt hour o' the night,
That Thrummy waken'd, and thus spoke :
" Preserve's !" quo' he, " I'm like to choke
Wi' thirst, an' I maun ha'e a drink ;
I will gae down the stairs, I think,
An' grapple for the water pail ;
O ! for a waught o' caller ale !"
But Johnny says to him, " Na, na,
I wanna lat ye gang awa ;
Wow ! will you gang and leave me here
My lane, to die wi' perfect fear ?"
" Rise and gae wi' me then," quo' Thrummy,
" Ye senseless guid-for-naething bummy.
I'm only gaun to seek some water,
An' I'll be back just in a clatter."
" Na, na," says John, " I'll rather lie ;
But as I'm likewise something dry,
Gin ye can get a jug or cap,
Fetch up to me a little drap."
" Aye, aye," says Thrummy, " that I will,
Although you sudna get a gill."
Sae down he gaes to seek a drink,
An' syne he thinks he sees a blink
O' light, that shone upo' the floor,
Out through the keyhole o' a door,
Whilk was nae fast, but stood ajee ;

Whatever's there he thinks he'll see.
 He bauldly o'er the threshold ventures,
 An' in within the cellar enters.
 But, reader, judge o' his surprise,
 When there he saw, with wond'ring eyes,
 A spacious vault, weel filled wi' casks
 O' reamin' ale, an' some big flasks.
 An' strideleg o'er a cask o' ale
 He saw the likeness o' himsel',
 Just i' the dress that he coost aff :
 A thrummy cap, and aiken staff,
 Gamashes, an' a jockey coat,
 An' in its hand the ghaist had got
 A big four-luggit timmer bicker,
 Filled to the brim wi' reamin' liquor.
 Our hero at the spectre star'd,
 But neither daunted was nor feared.
 He to the ghaist straight up did step,
 An' says, " Dear brother Thrummy Cap,
 The warst ye surely dinna drink,
 I'll try the same o' yours, I think."
 Syne taks a jug, pu's out the pail,
 An' fills it up o' the same ale
 Frae under where the spectre sat,
 An' up the stairs wi' it he gat,
 Took a good drink, gied John anither,
 But never tauld him o' his brither,
 That he into the cellar saw,
 Mair than he'd naething seen ava.
 Right brown and nappy was the beer,
 " Whare did you get it ? " John did spier.
 Says he, " I'm sure you needna care ;
 I'll gae an' see to get some mair."
 Sae down the stairs again he goes
 To get a drink, anither dose,

Being positive to hae some mair,
 But still he found the ghaist was there,
 Now on a butt, behind the door.
 Says he, " You did nae ill afore,
 Dear brither Thrummy, sae I'll try
 You ance again, because I'm dry."
 Syne fills his jug right out below,
 An' up the stair again does go.
 John marvell'd sair, but didna spier
 Again whare he had got the beer ;
 For this was stronger than the first,
 Sae they baith drank till like to burst,
 An' syne composed themsel's to rest,
 To sleep a while they judged it best.
 An hour in bed they hadna been,
 An' scarcely weel had closed their een,
 Whan just into the neighbouring cham'er
 They heard a dreadfu' din and clamour.
 Aneath the bed-claise John did cour,
 But Thrummy jumpt upo' the floor.
 Him by the sark-tail John did haud :
 " Lie still," quo' he, " fat, are ye mad ?"
 Thrummy then turned him round about
 An' lent John in the ribs a clout,
 'Till on the bed he tumbled down
 In little better than a swoon ;
 While Thrummy, as fast's he could rin,
 Gaed aff to see what made the din.
 The chamber seem'd to him as light
 As if the sun was shining bright ;
 The ghaist was standing near the door
 In the same dress it had before,
 An' o'er anent it, at the wa',
 Were ither apparitions twa !
 These spirits seem'd to kick a ba',

The ghaist against the ither twa ;
 Whilk close they drave baith back an' fore
 Atween the chimla' an' the door.
 Thrummy a while beheld the play,
 Syne rinnin' up, he this did say—
 "Ane for ane may weel compare,
 But twa for ane is rather sair ;
 The play's nae equal, say, I vow,
 Dear brither Thrummy, I'll help you."
 Syne wi' his fit he kicked the ba',
 Gar'd it play stot against the wa'.
 Quick then as lightning frae the sky
 The spectres ga'e a horrid cry
 An' vanished in a clap o' thun'er,
 While Thrummy at the same did won'er.
 The room was quiet noo an' mirk,
 An' Thrummy, stilping in his sark,
 Glaumpin' the gate back to his bed,
 He thinks he hears a person tread,
 An' ere he gat without the door
 The ghaist again stood him afore,
 An' in his face did starin' stan'
 Wi' a big can'le in its han'.
 Quo' Thrummy, "Frien', I want to know
 What brings ye frae the shades below.
 I in my Maker's name command
 Ye'll tell yer story just aff-hand.
 Fat wad ye hae?—I'll do my best
 For you, to lat you be at rest."
 Then says the ghaist, "'Tis forty year
 Since I've been doomed tae wander here ;
 In a' that time there has been nane
 Behaved sae bold as ye have deen ;
 Sae if you'll do a job for me
 Disturbance mair I'll never gie."

"Sae on your tale," quoth Thrummy, "I
 To do you justice sure will try."
 "Then mark me well," the ghaist replied,
 "An' ye shall soon be satisfied.
 Frae this aback near fifty year
 I of this place was overseer,
 Whan this laird's father had the land
 A'thing was then at my command,
 Wi' power to do as I thought fit,
 In ilka cause I chief did sit.
 The Laird paid great respect to me,
 But I an ill return did gie:
 The title deeds o' his estate
 Out o' the same I did him cheat,
 An' staw them frae where they did lie
 Some days afore the laird did die.
 His son at that time was in France,
 An' sae I thought I'd hae some chance,
 Gif he should never come again,
 That the estate would be my ain.
 But scarcely three bare weeks were past
 When death did come and grip me fast,
 Sae sudden that I hadna power
 The charters back for tae restore.
 Soon after that hame cam the heir,
 An' syne got up the reefu' rair—
 What sorrow was come o' the rights?
 He sought them several days an' nights,
 But never yet ha'e they been seen,
 As I aneath a muckle stane
 Did hide them i' this cham'er wa',
 Weel sew'd up in a leather ba';
 But I was ne'er allowed to rest
 Until that I the same confess;
 But this to do I hadna pow'r

Frae yon time tae this vera hour,
 That I've reveal'd it a' tae you ;
 An' noo I'll tell you what tae do—
 Till nae langsyne nae mony kent
 That this same laird the rights did want,
 But noo they hae him at the law,
 An' the neist ook the laird maun shaw
 Afore the court, the rights o' 's lan',
 This puts him tae an unco stan',
 For if he disna shaw them there
 O' a' his lands he'll be stript bare ;
 Nae hope has he to save his 'state,
 This maks him sour and unco blate.
 He canna think whar's rights may be,
 An' ne'er expects them mair to see.
 But noo, my frien', mark what I tell,
 An' ye'll get something tae yersel' :
 Tak oot that stane there in the wa',
 An' there you'll get the leather ba'.
 'Tis just the same that ye did see,
 When you said that ye would help me.
 The rights are sew'd up in its heart ;
 But see you dinna wi' them part
 Until the laird shall pay you down
 Just fifty guineas an' a crown,
 Whilk at my death was due tae me.
 This for thy trouble I'll gi'e thee,
 An' I'll disturb this hoose nae mair,
 'Cause I'll be free frae a' my care."
 This Thrummy promised tae do,
 An' syne the ghaist bade him adieu,
 An' vanish'd wi' a pleasant soond
 Doon thro' the laft an' thro' the ground.
 Thrummy gaed back syne tae his bed
 An' cowardly John was very glad

That he his neighbour saw ance mair,
 For o' his life he did despair.
 "Wow man," quo' John, whare hae ye been?
 Come tell me a' fat ye have seen."
 "Na, bide," says Thrummy, "till daylight,
 I'll tell ye syne, baith clear an' right."
 Sae down they lay an' took a nap
 Until the ninth hour it did chap.
 Whan John was sleepin' Thrummy raise,
 An' to the cham'er aff he gaes,
 Taks the big stane frae out the wa',
 An' soon he fand the leather ba',
 Took out the rights, replaced the stane,
 Ere John weel kent whare he had been.
 Syne baith cam stappin doon the stair.
 The morning noo was calm an' fair.
 "Weel, says the Laird, "my trusty frien',
 Hae ye ought in our cham'er seen?"
 Quo' Thrummy, "Sir, I naething saw
 That did me ony ill ava."
 "Weel," quo' the Laird, "ye noo may gang,
 Ye ken the day's nae vera lang;
 In the meantime it's calm an' clear,
 Ye lose your time in biding here."
 Quo' Thrummy, "Sir, mark what I tell,
 I've mair right here than you yoursel',
 Sae till I like I here shall bide."
 The Laird at this began tae chide.
 Says he, "My friend, your turnin' rude,"
 Quo' Thrummy, "I'll my claim mak guid,
 For I just here afore you a'
 The Rights o' this Estate can shaw,
 An' that is mair than ye can do."
 "What!" quo' the Laird, "can that be true?"
 "'Tis true," quo' Thrummy, "look an' see—

D'ye think that I wad tell a lie?"
 The parchment frae his pouch then drew,
 An doon upo' the table threw.
 The Laird at this up tae him ran,
 An' cried, "Whar did ye get them, man?"
 Syne Thrummy tald him a' the tale,
 As I've tald you, baith clear an' hale.
 The Laird at this was fidgin' fain
 That he wad get his rights again;
 An' fifty guineas down did tell,
 Besides a present frae himsel'.
 Thrummy him thanked, and syne the gowd
 Intil a muckle purse he stow'd,
 An' cramm'd it in his oxter pouch,
 An' syne sought oot his aiken crutch;
 "Now, fare-ye-well, I maun awa',
 An' see gin I get through the sna'."
 "Weel, fare-ye-well," replied the Laird.
 "But hoo comes it ye haena shar'd
 Or gien yer neibor o' the money?"
 "Na, by my saul I, Sir," quo' Thrummy,
 "When I this siller sair did win,
 To share wi' him wad be a sin;
 Afore that I the ghaist had laid
 The nasty beast had —— the bed."
 An' sae my tale I here do end.
 I hope no one it will offend.
 My Muse will nae assist me langer,
 The dorty jade sometimes does anger;
 I thought her ance a gay smart lass,
 But now she's come till sic a pass
 That a' my cudgelling an' whipping
 Will hardly wake her out o' sleepin'.
 To plague her mair I winna try,
 But dight my pen and lay it by.

