

# Donegore Hill

Written by James Orr

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*Ephie's base bairntime, trail-pike brood,  
Were arm'd as weel as tribes that stood;  
Yet on the battle ilka cauf  
Turn'd his backside, an' scamper'd aff.*  
Psalm 78, v. 9

The dew-draps wat the fiels o' braird,  
That soon the war-horse thortur'd;  
An falds were op'd by monie a herd  
Wha lang ere night lay tortur'd;  
Whan chiels wha grudg'd to be sae tax'd  
An tyth'd by rack-rent blauth'ry,  
Turn'd out *en masse*, as soon as ax'd —  
And unco throuither squath'ry  
Were we, that day.

While close-leagu'd crappies rais'd the  
hoards  
O' pikes, pike-shafts, forks, firelocks,  
Some melted lead - some saw'd deal-  
boards —  
Some hade, like hens in byre-neuks:  
Wives baket bonnocks for their men,  
Wi' tears instead o' water;  
An' lasses made cockades o' green  
For chaps wha us'd to flatter  
Their pride ilk day.

A brave man firmly leain' hame  
I ay was proud to think on;  
The wife-obeyin' son o' shame  
Wi' kindlin' e'e I blink on:  
"Peace, peace be wi' ye! — ah! return  
Ere lang and lea the daft anes" —  
"Please guid," quo he, "before the morn  
In spite o' a' our chieftains,  
An' guards, this day."

But when the pokes o' provender  
Were slung on ilka shou'der,  
Hags, wha to henpeck didna spare,  
Loot out the yells the louder. —  
Had they, whan blood about their heart  
Cauld fear made cake, an' crudle,  
Ta'en twa rash gills frae Herdman's quart,  
'Twad rous'd the calm, slow puddle  
I' their veins that day.

Now *Leaders*, laith to lea the rigs  
Whase leash they fear'd was broken,  
An' *Privates*, cursin' purse-proud prigs,  
Wha brought 'em balls to sloken;  
Repentant Painites at their pray'rs,  
An' dastards crouselly craikin',  
Move on, heroic, to the wars  
They meant na to partake in,  
By night, or day.

Some fastin' yet, now strave to eat  
The piece, that butter yellow'd;  
An' some, in flocks, drank out cream  
crocks,  
That wives but little valu'd:  
Some lettin' on their burn to mak',  
The rear-guard, goadin', hasten'd;  
Some hunk'rin' at a lee dyke back,  
Boost houghel on, ere fastened  
Their breeks, that day.

The truly brave, as journeyin' on  
They pass by *weans* an' *mithers*,  
Think on red fiel's, whare soon may  
groan,  
The *husbands*, an' the *fathers*:  
They think how soon thae bonie things  
May lose the youths they're true to;  
An' see the rabble, strife ay brings,  
Ravage their mansions, new to  
Sic scenes, that day.

When to the tap o' Donegore  
Braid-islan' corps cam' postin',  
The red-wud, warpin, wild uproar,  
Was like a bee scap castin';  
For \*\*\*\*\* took ragweed farms,  
(Fears e'e has ay the jaundice)  
For *Nugent's* red-coats, bright in arms,  
An' rush! the pale-fac'd randies  
Took leg, that day.

The *camp's* brak up. Owre braes, an' bogs,  
The *patriots* seek their *sections*;  
Arms, ammuniton, bread-bags, brogues,  
Lye skail'd in a' directions:  
Ane half, alas! wad fear'd to face  
Auld Fogies, faps, or women;  
Tho' strong, untried, they swore in pride,  
"Moilie wad dunch the yeomen,"  
Some wiss'd-for day.

Come back, ye dastards! — Can ye ought  
Expect at your returnin',  
But wives an' weans stript, cattle hought,  
An' cots, an' claughin's burnin'?  
Na, haste ye hame; ye ken ye'll 'scape,  
'Cause *martial* worth ye're clear o';  
The nine-tail'd cat, or choakin' rape,  
Is maistly for some hero,  
On sic a day.

*Saunt Paul* (auld Knacksie!) counsels weel —  
*Pope*, somewhere, does the samen,  
That, "first o' a', folk sud themsel's  
Impartially examine;"  
Gif that's na done, whate'er ilk loun  
May swear to, never swith'rin',  
In ev'ry pinch, he'll basely flinch —  
"Guidbye to ye, my brethren."  
He'll cry, that day.

The leuks o' wheens wha stay'd behin',  
Were mark'd by monie a passion;  
By dread to staun, by shame to rin,  
By scorn an' consternation:  
Wi' spite they curse, wi' grief they pray,  
Now move, now pause a bit ay;  
"Tis mad to gang, 'tis death to stay,"  
An unco dolefu' ditty,  
On sic a day.

What joy at hame our entrance gawe!  
"Guid God! is't you? fair fa' ye! —  
'Twas wise, tho' fools may ca't no' brave,  
To rin or e'er they saw ye." —  
"Aye wife, that's true without dispute,  
But lest saunts fail in Zion,  
I'll hae to swear \*\*\* forc'd me out;  
Better he swing than I, on  
Some hangin' day."

My story's done, an' to be free,  
Owre sair, I doubt, they smarted,  
Wha wad hae bell'd the cat awae,  
Had they no been deserted:  
Thae warks pat skill, tho' in my min'  
That ne'er was in't before, mon,  
In tryin' times, maist folk, you'll fin',  
Will act like Donegore men  
On onie day.

# Vocabulary

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**fiels** – fields

**monie** – many

**lang** – long

**chiels** – men

**ax'd** – asked

**unco** – strange

**throuther** – agitated

**squathry** – a disorderly confused crowd

**byre-neuks** – corners of barns

**lasses** – girls

**wha** – who

**ilk** – each, every

**hame** – home

**e'e** – eye

**lang** – long

**daft** – foolish

**quo** – said (in reported speech)

**poke** – bag

**shou'der** – shoulder

**cauld** – cold

**twad** – it would

**wheens** – numbers

**staun** – stand

**rin** – run

**saunts** – saints

**ay** – continually

**gang** – go

**fair fa' ye!** – welcome!

**owre sair** – too sorely / grievously

**maist** – most

**onie** – any

# Poem Analysis

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This poem, by James Orr ('The Bard of Ballycarry'), considered to be the best of the Weaver Poets, focuses on a particularly sad period that deeply affected the Ulster-Scots community – the 1798 Rebellion. Although the main hostilities lasted only three months, thousands lost their lives, and many others had to emigrate to America, including Orr himself. Among those hanged for his part in the rebellion was Rev. James Porter, Presbyterian minister of Greyabbey, in County Down.

James Orr's poem tells us that the *chiels* (young men) who *turn'd out* were rebelling against being *tax'd an tyth'd by rack-rent blauth'ry*. At the time, *tythes* (tithes – theoretically a tenth of one's income, in money or produce) were collected by government to support the established church (the Church of Ireland), no matter the religious denomination of those paying them. *Rack-rent* refers to the demand for excessive rent (usually from tenant farmers), charges which those who relied on what was basically subsistence farming found it hard to pay. *Blauth'ry* means 'riff-raff'. Orr gives us an insight into how poorly equipped the rebels were, with what were basically farm implements that had been hidden in the corners of cowsheds (*byre-neuks*). And they were *throuither* (disorganised), a word much used by Ulster-Scots speakers today.

Orr's tone is cynical, and he is scathing about the lack of resolve on the part of many of the participants. The penultimate verse envisages the return home to his wife of one of those who ran. She cries, '*Fair fa' ye!*' ('Welcome!'), and says he was wise to *rin or e'er they saw ye* ('run before they saw you'). Orr concludes that the outcome might have been very different if they had stayed and fought as one body. The final verse contains an interesting point:

*I doubt* (usually 'A doot' in Ulster-Scots) should not be confused with the way 'I doubt' is used in English. In Ulster-Scots, it means 'I believe, I think', whereas in English it is an expression of scepticism about whether something will happen. The poem ends on a note of resignation, particularly poignant given Orr's long-standing personal commitment to the cause of the rebellion.



# Poet Bio

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## James Orr

Born in 1770, Orr's father owned a few acres of land near the village of Ballycarry and made a living as a weaver, an occupation that was later followed by the poet.

Perhaps because he was an only child, his parents were very fussy about his education and taught him at home. His father was well educated for a humble weaver. The family actively discouraged the young James from mixing with other children in case he would be led into bad conduct.

Although not much is known about his early years, it does seem that his first efforts at verse took place in a singing-school. In the Presbyterian church, it was then forbidden to sing the words of the Psalms when they were only practising, so they made up other words which they sang to the Psalm tunes. James turned out to be particularly good at this.

The first poems he had published appeared in the *Northern Star*, which was a Belfast newspaper linked to the movement that later became involved in the 1798 Rebellion (or "The Turn-Out"), and he continued to write for the paper. He was one of those who was present at the Battle of Antrim on the 7th June 1798, of which his poem "*Donegore Hill*" is an account. At this, the first battle of the Rebellion, the rebels were soundly defeated and many of their ill-equipped number scattered throughout the countryside. Orr was scathing about their lack of courage; but he felt his own position to be insecure and emigrated to America.

While there, James Orr continued to write, having his poems published in an American newspaper. However, he returned home after only a few months. His first book of poetry was financed by subscription, which meant that those who liked his work paid in advance to help him afford the printing and binding of the book, and a list of their names was placed in the foreword.

## Donegore Hill

James Orr never married, and he had no brothers or sisters. He had become acquainted with his circle of friends through the Masonic Order, and with them he tended to spend too much time at the local inn.

However, James Orr, or “The Bard of Ballycarry” as he became known, is generally thought to be the best of “The Weaver Poets”. Shortly before he died on 24th April 1816, he asked two of his friends to take on the job of preparing for the press those poems of his that would be left unpublished, and it was his wish that, after the expenses of publication were deducted, the profits from the sale of this last book would go to help the poor of the parish in which he was born.