

SAWNEY'S LETTERS,

—OR—

CARIBOO RHYMES.

By James Anderson

FROM 1864 TO 1868.

LETTER NO. I.

[WRITTEN FEBRUARY, 1864.]

DEAR SAWNEY,—I sit doon to write
A screed to you by candle light,
An answer to your friendly letter,
Ne'er had ane that pleased me better.
Your letter cam by the Express,
Eight shillin's carriage,—naethin' less.
You'll think this awfu' tis, nae doot—
(A dram's twa shillin's here-aboot);
I'm sure if Tamie Ha'—the buddy
Was here wi' his three legged cuddy
He hauls abent him wi a tether,
He'd beat the Express, faith a' thegither—
To speak o't in the truest way
Tis Barnard's Cariboo Delay.

You'd maybe like to ken what pay
Miners get here for ilka day.
Jist twa pound sterling, sum as death—
If should be four—sum as death.
There's naething but a gang and come on;
And should you bide the winter here
The shuppy-buddles'll grab your gear,
And little work ane finds to do
A' the lang dreary winter thro'.

Sawney—had ye your tatties here,
And neeps and carrots—dinna speer
What price—tho' I could tell ye weel,
Ye might think me a leein' chiel;
Nae, lad, ye ken I never lee.
Ye a believe that fa's fae me;
Neeps, tatties, carrots—by the pun'
Jist twa and a penny—try for fun
How a nuckle twad be for a ton.
Aft meal four shillin's flour is twa,
And milk's no to be had ava
For at this season o' the year
There's naething for a coo up here
To chaw her cud on—sae ye see
Ye are far better aff than me,
For while you're sittin warm at hame,
And suppin' parritch drooned in cranme
The deil a drap o' milk hae I
But gobble our my parritch dry;
Of course, I can get butter here,
Twa shillin' a pund—it's far our dear.
Aye—a thing sells at a lang price—
Tea, coffee, sugar, bacon, rice,
Four shillin's a pound, and something mair,
And e'en the weights are rather bare—
Sae much for prices.

Noo for claims,

And first a word about their names;
Some folk were aas oppressed wi' wit
The ca'd their claim by name—Coo—
And tho' they struck the dirt by name
They ne'er struck pay dirt in their claim.
Some others made a gas-fine joke
And christend their bit ground 'Dead Broke'
While some, to fix their fate at once,
Gad their bonny 'The Last Chance'

There's 'Tinker,' 'Grizzly'—losh, what names,
There's 'Prince o' Wales'—the best o' claims,
There's 'Beauregard' and 'Never Sweat.'
And scores o' others I forget.
The 'Richfield' and the 'Montreal';
They say they struck the pay last fall.
But will the strik' it gin the spring,
Aye, Sawney, that's another thing;
But by an' bye they'll ken, nae doot,
If they can pump their water oot,
Some strik' the bed-rock pitchin' in,
And some the bed-rock caana win,
But ne'er a color can they see
Until they saut it first a wee;
And syne they tell to ilka man
They struck twa dollars to the pan,
You'll see'd into the Victoria Press
As twenty dollars—naething less.
Aye, Sawney, here a wee bit story,
Gin ance it travels to Victory,
Is magnified a hundred fold.
The bed-rock here: doon there is gold;
Some folks would say it's a rare loss
To mak' a bawbee on a cheese.
Shame on the man who salts a claim.
A man he is—but jist in name—
NO MANHOOD'S IN HIM, HE'S A CHEAT,
A SMOOTH, DISSEMBLING HYPOCRITE,
WHO, IF HE COULD BUT GAIN HIS END,
WOULD E'EN DECEIVE HIS DEAREST FRIEND.

There is a set o' men up here
Wha never work thro' a' the year,
A kind o' serpents, crawlin' snakes,
That fleece the miner o' his stakes;
They're Gamblers—honest men some say,
Tho' its quite fair to cheat in play
If it's no kent o'—I ne'er met
An honest man a Gambler yet!
O, were I Judge in Cariboo
I'd see the laws were carr'd thro',
I'd hae the cairds o' every pack
Tied up into a gunny sack,
Wi' a' the gamblers chained thegither
And banish'd frae the creek forever.
But, Sawney, there's another clan,
There's nane o' them I'd ca' a man.
They ca' them "jumpers"—it's my belief
That jumper is Chinook for thief—
The jump folks claims and jump their lots,
They jump the very pans pots;
But wait a wee—for a' this evil—
Their friend'll jump them.

He's the deevil.

And sae ye think o' comin' here,
And leavin' all your guidns and gear,
Your wife and bairns, and hame, eh, Sawney,
If ye wad listen to advic—
And sae ye will if ye be wise |
Jist hide at hame and work awa' |
Ye mauns think ye houk up gold,
As ye the tatties frae the mould.
Gude faith, ye'll maybe houk a twa' mo' |
An' neever get a ghash o' |
An' then what comes o' us pair deevils.

We get as thin and lean as weevils;
O' wark we caana get a stroke,
We're what they ca' out here 'dead broke',
Which means we hinna e'en a great
To line our stomach or our coat,
Sae doo the country we may gang,
And this is burden-o' our sang,
To ilka ane that comes along,
Freend be advised and turn aboot,
For Cariboo is noo 'played oot.'

Noo, Sawney, I'll blaw oot the light,
I'll finish this some-ither night,
I'll cast my coat and breeks, that's a'
And sleep until the daylight daw.

DEAR SAWNEY,—I noo tak the time
To feenish oot my thread o' rhyme,
But as my bobbin's getting bare
I'll no can spin ye muckle mair,
An' sae ye're guid auld mither's dead,
This aye keeps remain' in my head.
Eh, weel I mind the awful lickin'
She gae us twa for pusie stickin'!
Noo even when I think o' that,
What gar'd her fyte sae 'boot a cat'
An' it had worried oor she rabbit,
An' feckled a' the young an's grabbit,
But when ye're mither fand this oot
She ca'd the cat a clarty brute,
An' as she skelped us sae cruel
She fill'd our stomachs fu' o' gruel.
Aye, Sawney, lad, auld folks maun dee,
An' young uns may—so let us be:
Twa doonright honest, trustin' men,
Syn we'll be ready noo er then.
An' ye hae got another bairn,
Another stone to haip the cairn
Aye, aye, for ilka ane that dees,
There's ane and maybe mair that sees.
Sae dander-headed Smiddy Jock
Is rivetted wi' Maggie Lock!
I caana think hoo she could mairy
Sic a blethin' harum-scarly;
Some folks dislike what others like,
An' some see guid in the warst tyke,
Sae Maggie may see this in Johnnie,
But, certies me, he is no 'Bunny'
Ye ken I liked this lass fu' weel;
An' thoct mysel' a happy chiel.
Ah, I should ne'er hae trusted Mag,
She's like her mither Eve—the hag—
Wha fell in love, lang time ago,
Wi' that auld blacksmith doon below;
Believin' a his words were true,
She put the aiple in her mou,
An' whan auld Aidam she had gotten,
They ate it, but they found it rotten?
They lost the guid, and got the evil.
A' thro' oor mither's bein' sae ceevil!
Ye ken that like producee like,
That bees are bred in a bee's hyke.
Sae evil doon frae Aidam ran
A thro' the veins o' every man,
An' woman, too—Sae MAGGIE LOCKE
FORGAT HER JAMES AND STRAYED WI' JOCK!