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David Robb  
*University of Dundee*

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## "The Poor Man's Friend in Need": Baird, Burns and Miller

### Cover Page Footnote

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## **“The poor man’s friend in need”: Baird, Burns and Miller**

*David Robb*

... that best portion of a good man’s life,  
His little, nameless, unremembered, acts  
Of kindness and of love

Not all acts of kindness, thankfully, go unremembered. George Husband Baird (1761-1840), principal of Edinburgh University for an astonishing forty-seven years, was a good man and his life, we may be sure, had its full quota of acts of kindness and of love. For most students of Scottish literary history, however, Baird would be quite unremembered, had it not been for particular acts of kindness and of love which brought him into contact with two of Scotland’s finest writers, Robert Burns and Hugh Miller. While Baird tried to help Miller directly, it was with a view to helping someone else, that he had turned to Burns many decades earlier. A comparison of the two episodes underlines for us the transition from one age to another, even within a single lifetime, for although acts of kindness might seem outside time, the spirit of the age may be just as visible in them as in any other human action, detectable in the traces of even our most humble initiatives.

For Baird’s lifetime covered a period of particularly crucial change in Scotland and there can be no modern study of the Scottish Enlightenment which does not explore the suddenness and completeness of its demise. Nor is it only from the viewpoint of a later century that it is apparent how rapidly, at this juncture, one distinct age followed another. Scott’s famous statement which resonates in the final

chapter of *Waverley* ('there is no European nation which, within the course of half a century or little more, has undergone so complete a change as this kingdom of Scotland') is only one of many which reveal the astonished self-awareness of the generations whose lives straddled the new millennium. Cockburn's *Memorials of His Time* (1856) are a late and substantial embodiment of that awareness, but one encounters — here, there and everywhere in the writings of the period — innumerable expressions of the same perception. Lockhart, for example, in *Peter's Letters To His Kinsfolk* (1819), evokes his youthful enthusiasm for the novels of Henry Mackenzie thus, the imaginings of that earlier age now seeming like a blissful dream in comparison to the brittle, mundane present:

The beautiful visions of his pathetic imagination had stamped a soft and delicious, but deep and indelible impression on my mind, long before I had heard the very name of criticism; perhaps before any of the literature of the present age existed — certainly long, very long, before I ever dreamt of its existence. The very names of the heroes and heroines of his delightful stories, sounded in my ears like the echoes of some old romantic melody, too simple, and too beautiful, to have been framed in these degenerate over-scientific days.<sup>1</sup>

Baird lived through one of the most significant transitions in modern Scottish life. Admittedly, we cannot expect to reconstruct the ending of the Scottish Enlightenment out of two small episodes in the life of one obscure man but it might be possible, at the very least, to register a changing atmosphere when we look at some of the details we find in them.

George Baird, one could argue, is a particularly good piece of litmus for illuminating the changing environments encountered in his long life, for while he was clearly sufficiently active as a man of books, and of religion, and of practical administration to gain and maintain the personal approval of his contemporaries, he was far from being a leading spirit of his age. Although occupying a position of

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<sup>1</sup> John Gibson Lockhart, *Peter's Letters To His Kinsfolk*, ed. William Ruddick (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press for ASLS, 1977), p. 25.

social prominence in Scott's Edinburgh—indeed two positions of prominence, for not only was he principal of the university but he also commanded a series of prestigious pulpits culminating in that of the High Church—he seems to have left surprisingly little mark on the consciousnesses of most of his fellows. He is not mentioned in Scott's *Journals*, nor does he pop up in Cockburn's *Memorials*. He seems to have made no impression on Lockhart while he was writing *Peter's Letters* nor has Elizabeth Grant, the 'Highland Lady', anything to say about him in her memoirs. He does make an appearance, however, in Lockhart's *Life of Scott* because he it was who led the distinguished company in prayer, in Abbotsford itself, before Scott's coffin set off on its journey to Melrose Abbey. While clearly a solid (indeed, for long, a seemingly immovable) presence in the Edinburgh scene, he was one of those overshadowed by the greatness which surrounded him: his immediate predecessor as principal was the historian William Robertson, and it was as Hugh Blair's successor that he took over the pulpit of the High Church. He can be seen, if we choose, as a figure emblematic of Edinburgh's slow descent from cultural pre-eminence into mere professional respectability.

It would be easy to make him out to be no more than a nonentity who got lucky. Michael Shortland describes him, with obvious justification, as 'by any reckoning an undistinguished occupant of the office [of principal]'.<sup>2</sup> In 1792, while still the local minister in the obscurity of Dunkeld, he had the good fortune to marry the daughter of Thomas Elder, lord provost of Edinburgh. It was an age of shameless patronage and within the year he had been made both minister of Edinburgh's New Greyfriars Church and joint professor of Hebrew at Edinburgh University. He had been an undergraduate there in the 1770s and had developed a notable skill in European languages but, like so many other Scottish students in that age, he had not actually gone so far as to obtain a formal degree. The university admittedly awarded him an honorary M.A. in 1787 in recognition of his

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Shortland, ed., *Hugh Miller's Memoir: From Stonemason to Geologist* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 1955), p. 17.

persistence as one 'who had been many years an alumnus' and now, in 1792, they awarded him an honorary D.D. as well.<sup>3</sup> The following year, on Robertson's death, he was made principal despite his total lack of academic distinction. It is as a sign that a decline from the intellectual and cultural peaks of the eighteenth-century Scottish Enlightenment was setting in that Richard B. Sher discusses Baird's appointment to the principalship:

Upon the death in June 1793 of William Robertson, the man who most fully represented the Moderate Regime in the church and university, this transformation [i.e. the fading of the Moderate clergy's centrality in Scotland's cultural life] was given symbolic expression. Expecting Robertson's office as principal of Edinburgh University to be offered to him as a mark of respect, Hugh Blair was deeply hurt when the town council chose instead a much younger minister who lacked impressive literary or academic credentials but possessed powerful political connections. This incident illustrates as well as any other the movement of Blair and his generation of Moderate literati from the center to the periphery of Scottish intellectual and institutional life.

And in a footnote, Sher quotes Blair's complaint in a letter (18 March 1795) to Alexander Carlyle:

The Provost [writes Blair] by his influence with the Council conferred the office at once on his son-in-law George Baird, without taking the smallest notice of me. I could not but feel this as an affront.<sup>4</sup>

Apart from the occasional letter, or prayer, which reached print, Baird's only published contribution to learning or knowledge was his 1796 edition of the poems of Michael Bruce (1746-67). More of this in a moment, but it can be said at the outset that (to put it kindly) a more self-effacing piece of editing by an editor is hard to conceive. When one turns to the Preface to get a sense of Baird's own response to his poet, one finds it to be made up largely of John Logan's original

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<sup>3</sup> Sir Alexander Grant, Bt., *The Story of the University of Edinburgh during its first three hundred years* (London: Longmans, Green, 1884), II:270.

<sup>4</sup> Richard B. Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment: the Moderate Literati of Edinburgh* (Princeton and Edinburgh, 1985), p. 322. Sher gives the reference for Blair's letter in the National Library of Scotland: NLS. 3431, 232-33.

preface from the first edition of 1770 and an essay from 1779 by Lord Craig on Bruce and his work, an essay which had apparently done much to establish Bruce's modest reputation. Baird's edition even retains Logan's original title. (To be fair, the edition does set out to correct the injustices and inaccuracies, in terms of the attribution of Bruce's poems, perpetrated by Logan earlier.)

Nor was Baird a dynamic leader of the university: in Alexander Grant's 1884 account of the institution he is described as not leading from the front (as we'd say) but as always going along with the majority views of the Senate. The latest *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* describes Baird's undergraduate performance as not brilliant but "plodding, persevering, and well-mannered."<sup>5</sup> One might conceivably rest content with that as a summary of his whole life. Perhaps a more generous (though still limiting) summary came from Sir Robert Christison (1797-1882), professor of medicine at Edinburgh University, who alludes to his 'kindliness, benignant features, cheerful deportment, deferential manners, conversational power, and [his] rich fund of anecdote' (Grant 270-1).

If Baird was not driven by academic ambition, however, it is clear that he had a marked desire to do good to his fellow creatures. In particular, he had a strong lifelong concern for those who were less fortunate than himself. (These were a goodly number: it is easy to feel that few members of his generation were *more* fortunate than Baird — at least until his final years.) Hence his interest in writing and writers emerging from the obscurity of humble life, and his passionate concern to improve the lot of those with little or no education. And it is in the comparison of the two particularly prominent cases in which he involved himself that we can not only do justice to Baird's humanity (if not to his intellectual eminence) but can also glimpse another facet of that "transformation" (to use Sher's word) of an eighteenth-century outlook based on a simple sense of our shared humanity as it developed into an incipient early-Victorian

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<sup>5</sup> A. B. Grosart, revised by M. C. Curthoys, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2004), III:345. Hereafter *ODNB*.

world of social analysis and goal-directed organization. Helping our fellows was becoming less a matter of merely aiding individual misfortune and more a case of organizing a full-scale response to society's imperfections. But it is time to turn to the two episodes themselves.

In his biography of Burns, Ian McIntyre touches upon the poet's generous response, in a letter from Ellisland, on February 28, 1791, to a request from Baird asking for a contribution of some words of introduction to increase the sales of a projected new edition of the poems of Michael Bruce.<sup>6</sup> It seems that Baird and Burns had been friendly at least from the early 1780s (in other words, even before Baird was placed in Dunkeld – the *DNB* says that, in old age, he often claimed to have met with Burns frequently at that time), and Baird had been one of the subscribers to the Kilmarnock Edition in 1786.

Burns responded to the request with speed and ardour, for Baird's main goal was not his own financial gain nor yet justice for the dead poet, but principally the raising of money to help support Bruce's still-living mother. McIntyre quotes the letter's opening, which vividly conveys Burns's enthusiasm in his mock outrage at Baird's tone of diffidence, and points out that Burns was willing to make available, additionally, any unpublished poem of his which Baird might think appropriate. This would have included "Tam o' Shanter" (though he does not specify it). In the event, Baird was counseled by Hugh Blair and John Moore against using any of Burns's poems and there is no obvious trace of Burns in the edition which finally emerged in 1796. The letter is worth quoted in its entirety:

Why did you, my dear Sir, write to me in such a hesitating style on the business of poor Bruce? Don't I know, & have I not felt, the many ills, the peculiar ills, that Poetic Flesh is heir to? -- You shall have your choice of all the unpublished poems I have; & had your letter had my address, so as to have reached me in course of post (it but came to hand this morning) I should have directly put you

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<sup>6</sup> Ian McIntyre, *Dirt & Deity: A Life of Robert Burns* (London: HarperCollins, 1995), pp. 279-80. For the full letter, quoted below, see Roy II: 75-76.



out of suspense about it. -- I suppose I need not premise, that I still reserve these my works so much in my power, as to publish them on my own account, if so the spirit move me, at any *after* period. -- I only ask that some prefatory advertisement in the Book, as well as the Subscrip<sup>n</sup> bills, may bear, that the Publication is solely for the behoof of Bruce's Mother: I would not leave Ignorance the least room to surmise, or Malice to insinuate, that I clubbed a share in the work from mercenary motives. --

Nor need you give me credit for any remarkable generosity in my part of the business. -- I have such a host of Peccadillos, Failings, Follies, & Backslidings (anybody but myself might perhaps give some of them a worse appellation) that by way of some balance, however trifling, in the account, I am fain, so far as my very limited power reaches, to do any good I can to my fellow-creatures, merely for the selfish purpose of clearing a little the vista of Retrospection. -- You who are a Divine, & accustomed to soar the wild-goose heights of Calvinistic Theology, may no doubt look down with contempt on my creeping notions; but I, who was forced to pick up my fragments of knowledge as the hog picks up his husks, at the plough-tail, can understand nothing sublimer than this debtor & creditor system. --

I sincerely feel for the lamentable, incurable breach, in the family of your truly illustrious Patron. -- I ever remember with grateful pride, my reception at Athole-house; & when I saw in the Newspapers the accounts of his Grace's conjugal Piety, my heart ached again, to have it in my power to take him by the hand & say, 'Sir, you are an honor to Human-nature; & I not only esteem, but revere you!' I intended to have strung my rustic Lyre to her Grace's ever-dear & sacred memory; but soon, all my ideas were absorbed in the agonies of a violent wrench Fate gave the dearest chords of my bosom, the death of the Earl of Glencairn. -- He also was a Being who did honor to that Omnipotence which called him into existence. -- From him all my fame & fortune took its rise: to him I owe every thing that I am or have, & for his Sake I wear these Sables with as much devout sincerity as ever bleeding Gratitude did for departed Benevolence. --

My kindest Compl<sup>nts</sup> to M<sup>r</sup> Walker.-- Do you know an acquaintance of M<sup>r</sup> Walker's, & a Countryman of mine, a M<sup>r</sup> Wyat? If you have an opportunity, please remember me kindly to him.--

You need not send me Bruce's M.S.S. for my criticisms.-- It is among very good hands, indeed among hands superior to mine, already.--

I have taxed your friendship with the trouble of transmitting the inclosed letter to Dr Moore, the celebrated author of *Zelucco*.-- I leave it open for your perusal, I mean the printed sheet.-- It is one of my latest productions; & I dare say you may have it, if you will, to accompany Bruce's works.-- Please inclose it with the card, & seal it with black, & send it to the Doctor.-- I do not know his particular address, but it will not be difficult to find, in a Man of his celebrity & rank.--

I am most sincerely, Yours  
ROBT BURNS

Ellisland near Dumfries

28<sup>th</sup> Feb<sup>ry</sup> 1791 (Roy II: 75-6)

Within the stylistic formalities of the age, the letter does indeed convey the intimacy of a few years standing between the two men: these are not strangers addressing each other. Burns is not bashful in hinting at the lack of strictness in his own private life, nor is he unwilling to invite Baird to chuckle over the 'wild-goose heights of Calvinistic Theology' or also at the ironic suggestion that he himself is not capable of understanding the intricacies of current religious thought. The letter wanders, too, from subject to subject in the way that a one-issue correspondence between two strangers would not do. And would Burns have risked that breezy, abrupt, half-accusing opening to someone he didn't know? Although this is the only letter to Baird to be found in Burns's collected correspondence, it seems to substantiate Baird's claim from later in his life that he and Burns had known each other rather well at this time.

However, what one wants to point to is Burns's recurrent stress on Feeling. This is hardly a surprise in a document from the Age of Feeling, but the letter brings home once more how, twenty years after Mackenzie's famous novel, the language of Feeling had become both pervasive and stylistically standard. ("have I not felt...I sincerely feel...my heart ached again"). It is not that we feel any insincerity on Burns's part, but simply that we recognize, once more, how Feeling was still woven throughout the contemporary manner of public self-expression.

And we can readily see here, in practice, how the age associated Feeling with morals and conduct: Burns is not just talking about what he feels but is demonstrating that he is feeling *rightly*. Furthermore, the main purpose of Burns's reply is to make an offer of considerable generosity to help a woman he has never met, the mother of a man he had also never met. We can also feel him responding, however, to two stock images of the time — the very stuff of Feeling — namely distressed, poverty-stricken Age, and (in 'poor Bruce') humble, obscure and luckless talent, the natural poet tragically thwarted by fate.

When Baird's edition of Bruce finally appeared, the surprisingly few words it contains from (it has to be assumed) Baird's own pen show the same characteristics: his awareness of a mother and son combined in undeserved misfortune elicits the same association of sympathetic feeling with moral action. As Baird says in introducing Craig's earlier paper, "ANNE BRUCE will read that paper with tenderness; and, with the tear of feeling in her eye, will pray, 'God bless him.'—That man is to be pitied who does not feel, that He who has so deserved this prayer, is enviable."<sup>7</sup>

The first episode, therefore, is very much of its time, namely a matter of two powerless individuals, ready objects of feeling (Michael Bruce and his mother), being pitied and assisted by a handful of (again) individuals with the emotional motivation to help (Baird, Burns, Craig). The whole episode is structured round individual human relations, interacting purely on the basis of direct sympathetic emotions.

By the time we come to the second instance, however, a new environment has been super-added to the simple humanity of human beings helping each other. Baird first met Hugh Miller in the course of his journeying as chair of a kirk committee for developing education in the Highlands, and the goal of Baird's efforts for Miller is no longer the simple relief of destitution but the furthering of a career. Baird himself had been the instigator of the General Assembly's Highlands and Islands Committee, the need for

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<sup>7</sup> [George Baird], in Michael Bruce, *Poems, on Several Occasions, A New Edition* (Edinburgh: John Paterson, 1796), p. ix.

which he had outlined in 1824 and which he had brought into being a year later. Hew Scott's *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae* says that, looking back after a few years of the committee's work, "he had found nearly one hundred thousand human beings unable to either read or write, and innumerable districts where the people could not hear sermon above once a year, and had seen thousands of habitations where a Sabbath bell was never heard, where he had now witnessed schools and libraries established, knowledge increased, and greedily received."<sup>8</sup> Nor was Baird's role confined to chairing committee meetings and addressing the Edinburgh General Assembly: he journeyed all over the highlands and islands. Hew Scott says that he covered around 7000 miles in total, an achievement which did immense credit to a man of his years. Hugh Miller says in *My School and Schoolmasters* that Baird had covered over 8000.<sup>9</sup>

Equally important, however, was fund-raising and the National Library of Scotland possesses a letter from Baird designed for exactly this purpose. It is what we'd call a circular letter: it is fully set up in print (thanks to the lamentable non-invention of photocopying) with space left simply for the name of the addressee, and it was doubtless sent out in dozens to all the landowners of the highland districts. Its purpose, predictably enough, is to persuade them to give financial support to the scheme: "A benevolent Landlord can perceive no higher ornament on his estates, than an intelligent, moral, and religious peasantry,--educated up to that degree which is suitable to their sphere of life."<sup>10</sup> And Baird was able to claim, after only four years of the committee's work, some impressive achievements: 85 schools had been established, attended by 7000 scholars, and needing an income of £2000 a year. But he reckoned nevertheless that 'upwards of 50,000 persons are computed

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<sup>8</sup> Hew Scott, *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae*, new ed. (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1915), I: 68.

<sup>9</sup> Hugh Miller, *My Schools and Schoolmasters: or, The Story of My Education* (Edinburgh, 1854), p. 431.

<sup>10</sup> Letter, 28<sup>th</sup> October, 1829, NLA: APS.3.81.19.

in these districts as unable to read or write.' Baird's passion and energy are clear to see.

If Baird lacked the highest intellectual distinction, he was notably (and creditably) endowed with human sympathy, moral energy and practical effectiveness. Both of the episodes which we are discussing here reveal these strengths, but whereas the earlier one has a quality (in its method and in the language associated with that method) which we might describe as feminine, his later philanthropic career, and the specific aid he held out to Hugh Miller (as well as the discourse surrounding it), are more typical of the masculine ethos of the 'post-Enlightenment' period in Edinburgh cultural life which Ian Duncan has recently analysed.<sup>11</sup>

As Miller indicates in his autobiography, it was while Baird was on one of his many tours of the highlands that he asked to meet with the author of the recently published *Poems of a Journeyman Mason* (1829). Shortland (p.18) is doubtless correct in assuming that Baird's initial interest in Miller was in part because of the stonemason's apparent potential as an example of what could be achieved by way of educating the highlanders, but despite Miller's awkwardness in responding to his overtures the principal's patience and sincerity in wishing to help the young man remained constant. (Baird's request for a straightforward letter outlining Miller's educational experiences resulted in a wholly unlooked-for document of over 60,000 words, and his initial generosity in offering to provide Miller with hospitality in his own home so that he might establish himself in Edinburgh was met with the sturdy response that, for the moment, Miller preferred to remain up north working as a stonemason.)

Miller's manuscript collection of letters from and to himself, copied out to form a volume of correspondence, can be consulted in Edinburgh University's New College Library.<sup>12</sup> Apart from the large documents which make up his Memoir and also the handful of scraps of correspondence

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<sup>11</sup> Ian Duncan, *Scott's Shadow: The Novel in Romantic Edinburgh* (Princeton & Oxford, 2007), pp. 42-4.

<sup>12</sup> Hugh Miller's Letter Book: New College MSS Mil 1.1.

which Shortland quotes in his edition, there are only a very few other letters between Baird and Miller, as well as an account by Miller (in a letter to another correspondent) of a visit he made to Baird early in 1835. These few items, however, are to illustrate the difference in tone and atmosphere surrounding this later instance of Baird's generosity. The language of Feeling has faded. While there is still a lingering courtliness, it no longer leans towards that paraded emotional softness which distinguishes expressions of sympathy during the previous age. Rather, it is direct, sometimes business-like, with Baird writing not merely as a hyper-sensitive individual but (as in this first example) as a practical man of affairs, writing not for himself but to convey the settled policy of the hard-headed committee which he chairs. He is responding to Miller's request on behalf of a friend of his:

I was glad to hear from you by your friend Mr Munro. He appears to me to be a man as you represent him of a sense and intelligence very creditable to him when compared with the means of improvement he has enjoyed.

I regret therefore very sincerely that the rules of the Assembly Committee unfortunately preclude their taking him on their list of candidates for one of their schools. His age being 42 is an insuperable bar to their doing so. For their resolution and their uniform practice has been to decline taking any individual on their list who has reached 40 years of age, -- as if they took them in more advanced life they feared that the number of super-annuation salaries might rise soon to a burdensome amount. (6 January 1830 [Letter no. 9])

And in dealing with Miller himself he can be brisk and business-like, even expressing himself in the third-person (and so, at the opposite pole from the first-person emotional confessions of men of Feeling):

Principal Baird presents his compliments to Mr Miller, and will be glad to learn whether Mr Miller has any objections to the Manuscript account of his own biography sent to the Principal some time ago being referred to in one of the literary journals, and parts of it being printed therein. The Principal will be happy always to hear of Mr Miller's welfare. (14 February 1832 [Letter no. 44])

Most revealing of all, perhaps, is Miller's account, in a letter to Lydia Fraser describing a visit to Baird made soon after Miller moved to Linlithgow while training to be a banker. Baird is not only clearly seriously ill but also the victim (it would appear) of a particularly heart-rending family circumstance. But where a writer of the previous age would doubtless have totally deliquessed when confronted with this situation, Miller is firm and objective, refusing to parade the sorrow and pity which he nevertheless clearly feels.

The poor principal found himself unable to rise and I was shewn up to his room. He received me with great kindness, held my hand between both his for more than ten minutes, and overpowered me with a multitude of questions, -- particularly regarding my new profession and what had led to it. Ah said he, when I had given him what he requested, - the history of my connexion with the Bank, the choice of your townsman Mr Ross shews that you still retain your character for steadiness and probity. The remark was accompanied with a sigh which at the time I could not understand. I was very desirous, he continued, to see you on Thursday. My friend Professor Wilson was dining at the house of a neighbouring gentleman; I was to have met with him there, and wished to have introduced you to him, but even had you not been engaged I could not have availed myself of the opportunity as I was taken so ill that after accepting I had to decline the invitation." [sic] He regretted that he should be so unable to do any thing for me, but said he would use his influence with the professor to procure me a favourable review. After sitting by his bed side for a short time I took my leave, afraid that he might injure himself by his efforts to entertain me; for they were evidently above his strength. It struck me too that there was a tone of despondency about him which mere indisposition could not have occasioned. -- Benevolent old man! from what I have since heard I have too much reason to conclude that his sickness is of the heart. The son whom I saw, -- a reckless dissipated man, has contracted debts to an immense, indeed unascertained amount, but they are known to exceed ten thousand pounds; he has involved his poor old father in them; and the family estate is in consequence in the market. Every one here is sorry for the Principal, and regret that in his old age he should be stripped of the property which he so delighted in, and of the wealth of which he made so excellent an use. (January? 1835 [Letter no. 128])

This is sensitive and far from unfeeling, but totally lacking the rhetoric of Feeling itself. There is no longer a pausing on the naked expression of emotion; instead, Miller's informal narrative sweeps on with its tale, human sympathy being conveyed primarily by the very absence of direct expression — and therefore contrasts with the language of Burns and Baird on the matter of 'poor Bruce'. But then, the latter were writing just before the creation of *Lyrical Ballads*, whereas Miller had long been familiar with the tight-lipped emotional depths of Wordsworth's reaction to, say, Simon Lee, the old huntsman:

I've heard of hearts unkind, kind deeds  
With coldness still returning.  
Alas! The gratitude of men  
Has oftner left me mourning.

There were no unkind hearts amongst Baird and his friends, but plenty of gratitude. That Baird's long life and involvements spanned ages which were a world apart was obvious to Miller himself. In another letter to Lydia, also in January 1835, he mused that Baird

seems to form a kind of connecting link between the literature of the past and of the present age. In his youth he was the friend and companion of men whose names leap to our tongues when we sum up the glories of our country, -- of Burns and Robertson and Blair. Nearly fifty years ago he edited the poems of Michael Bruce, in behalf of the mother of the poet, who was then very poor and very old, -- childless, and a widow. Twenty years after, he was the warm friend and patron of the linguist Murray. He was the first who introduced Pringle, the poet, to the notice of the public. He lived on terms of the closest intimacy with Sir Walter Scott, and is thoroughly acquainted with Wilson. What a stride from the times of the historian of Charles V to those of the editor of 'Blackwood's Magazine'! Does it not sound somewhat strangely that the friend and contemporary of the amiable though ill-fated poet of Kinross, who died nearly sixty years ago, should be the warm friend of your own H----  
--- M-----?<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Peter Bayne, *The Life and Letters of Hugh Miller* (London: Alexander Strahan, 1871), II: 35-36.