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The Merry Muses of Caledonia

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G. ROSS ROY

The Merry Muses of Caledonia

A fine copy of one of the most important editions of Robert Burns has recently come to light—the first edition of *The Merry Muses of Caledonia*, an illustration of the title page of which appears on Plate I.

Hitherto this edition was known only through the Earl of Rosebery's copy which has the lower part of the title page, including the date, torn away, but watermarks on the paper bearing the dates 1799 and 1800 had permitted the volume to be approximately dated. The Rosebery copy belonged at one time to William Scott Douglas, and was the copy used by Duncan McNaught to prepare the 1911 edition of the *Merry Muses* issued by the Burns Federation. As Sidney Goodsir Smith has pointed out in his "Merry Muses Introductory" to the 1959 edition of the *Merry Muses*, McNaught (whose principal concern was to disassociate Burns from this work as far as possible, as the sub-title of the 1911 edition, *A Vindication of Robert Burns*, clearly shows) did not accurately reproduce the text, but incorporated changes by William Scott Douglas as well as some of his own. In fact, the first faithful transcription of the text of the early volume was not available until Smith, James Barke and Professor DeLancey Ferguson published their edition privately in 1959. This work has now been publicly reissued in New York (1964) and London (1965).

The present copy measures 17.0 cm. high. It is in an unsigned tree calf binding with marbled end-papers. The binding appears to be c. 1840. Bound in was a steel engraved erotic plate and six crude woodcuts of an erotic nature, each with a ten-line bawdy poem. These seven plates have now been removed from the volume. Presumably two other plates were present but had been removed earlier leaving short stubs bound in.

As will be seen from Plate II, the name of the printer has been scraped from L4 (p. 127). A small hole in the half-title at the same position on the leaf raises the question whether the printer's name was not systematically removed in the shop after the gatherings had been assembled, but before the cover (presumably paper wrappers) had been

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affixed. Thus the hole in the half-title of the present copy would be explained by too great a pressure having been exerted in removing the printer's name from the last leaf of a copy piled on top of the present volume, with the result that not only the last leaf of that volume, but also the first leaf of the present volume were mutilated. The printer's name has been trimmed away in the Rosebery copy.

As with the Rosebery copy, the paper in this copy is watermarked 1799 and 1800; although they are not always on the same leaves, the watermarks in individual gatherings are of the same year as those of the Rosebery copy. There is no half-title present in the Rosebery copy. Watermarks are as follows:

Rosebery copy—

1799 — B3, C3.

1800 — D1, E3, F3, H1, I1, K3, L1.

Present copy—

1799 — A3, B3, C3.

1800 — Half-title, D3, E1, F3, G3, H3, I1, K3.

As in the Rosebery copy K2 is mislabelled H2.

This copy was purchased, through Bertram Rota Ltd., by the present writer for his own collection.

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

THE
MERRY
MUSES
OF
CALEDONIA;

A COLLECTION OF
FAVOURITE SCOTS SONGS,
Ancient and Modern;

SELECTED FOR USE OF THE
CROCHALLAN FENCIBLES.

Say, Puritan, can it be wrong,
To dress plain truth in witty song?
What honest Nature says, we should do;
What every lady does,--or would do.

PRINTED IN THE YEAR

1799

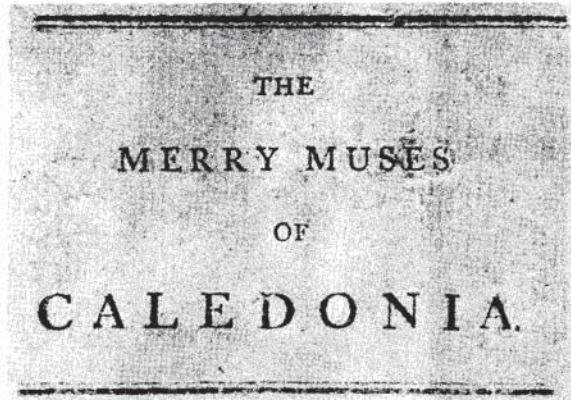


PLATE II—HALF TITLE
(Actual size)

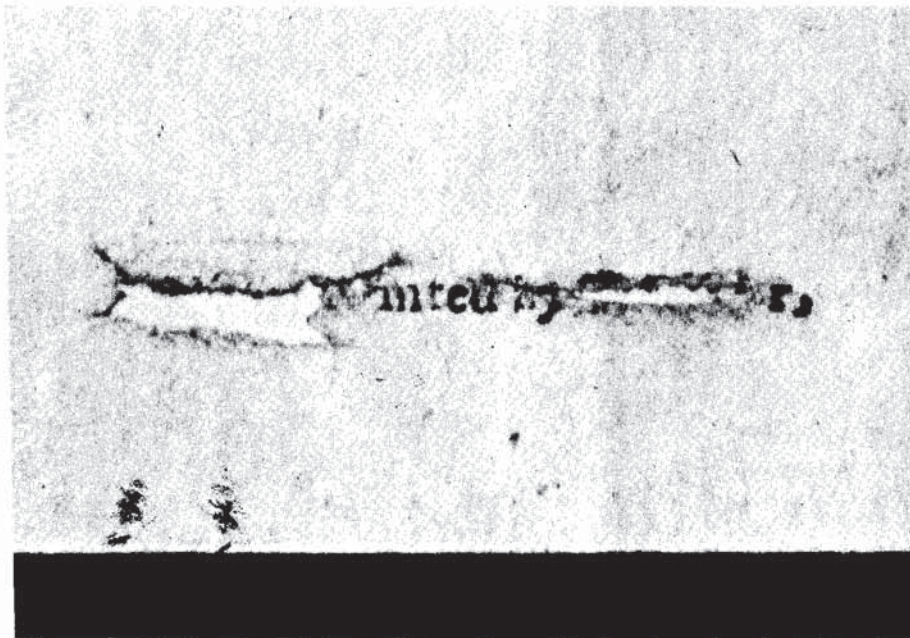


PLATE II—L4 (p. 127)
(Shown with 3x enlargement)