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Ae Godlie Ballate O' Anither Ettrick Shepherd

(A Tercentary Tribute to the Reverend Thomas Boston, M.A., 1676-1732)

by Johnstone G. Patrick

It is eleven years since Dr. Patrick last contributed a paper to THE EVANGELICAL QUARTERLY; that was an article commemorating the centenary of the birth of Don Miguel de Unamuno. This time he has come nearer home, and given us a tercentary tribute to Thomas Boston of Ettrick, author of The Fourfold State—"the unforgettable Thomas Boston" (as G. D. Henderson once called him in our pages). Dr. Patrick adopts Boston's native tongue for this tribute, but thoughtfully provides a glossary for readers who require one. His title recalls the "Gude and Godlie Ballates" of Reformation times, with a side glance at James Hogg, the Ettrick Shepherd. Readers who would like to know more about the "Marrow" controversy referred to in stanzas XVII-XXII should consult John Macleod, Scottish Theology, pp. 140-166. Particularly choice is his quotation of the reply given by John Colquhoun of Leith to divinity students who consulted him about reading matter: "Noo, I daurna advise ye to read The Marrow o' Modern Deeveenity, for ye ken the Assembly [of 1720] condemned it. But they didna condemn Tammas Bowston's notes on The Marrow" (p. 219).

I

Frae Simprin's nest tae Ettrick's crest,
 I' Seventeen-Nocht-Seven,
 Cam wir godlie Thomas Boston
 Upo' his wye tae Heaven;
 Cam wir Mess John, Thomas Boston,
 Tae Ettrick, by the birk,
 Frae Simprin, i' the elm an' ash,
 A makar o' wir Kirk.

II

Free Simprin's dale tae Ettrick's vale,
 Wi' nae ae road tae draw,
 Cam wir daurin' Thomas Boston,
 I' ainswer tae God's ca';
 Cam wir callant Thomas Boston,
 Whan he wes Thretty-Twa,
 Frae Simprin down tae Ettrick toun,
 A keeper o' God's law.

III

Frae Simprin's dell tae Ettrick's well,
Wi' weanies lo'ed sae deep,
Cam wir faithfu' Thomas Boston,
A shepherd o' God's sheep;
Cam wir sauntly Thomas Boston,
Tae preach the Wurd o' Life,
Frae Simprin's nest tae Ettrick's crest
Wi' Katherine his wife.

IV

Frae Simprin doun tae Ettrick groun',
Wi' parritch-pat an' pock,
Cam wir couthie Thomas Boston
Tae care for kintra-fock;
Cam wir halesome Thomas Boston,
Wi' hammer, heuk, an' hod,
Frae Simprin's dale tae Ettrick's vale,
A handyman o' God.

V

Frae Simprin's still, sequesterd life
Tae Ettrick's streek o' strain,
Cam he wha'd be tae freend an' fae
A blessin' an' a bane;
Cam he wha'd taen ae Kennet Bruce
Thru lear o' Ae tae Zed,
An' spied a kiltit sodger's beuk
Aboon a winnock-head.

VI

Frae Simprin doun tae Ettrick toun,
Wi' muckle faith, nae fear,
Cam wir braw, bricht Thomas Boston,
A scholar an' a seer;
Cam wir brainy Thomas Boston,
Wi' kist o' beuks sae odd,
Frae Simprin doun tae Ettrick groun',
A dominie o' God.

VII

Frae Simprin's peace tae Ettrick's war,
Tae mak us a' God's ain,
Cam wan wha i' the teeth o' tene,
Wes aften left alane;
Cam wir cannie Thomas Boston
Tae Ettrick Kirk, sae big,
Frae Simprin's Ha', sae snug an' sma',
I' a thingumajig.

VIII

Cam wir *pharos*, Thomas Boston,
 Wha widna shout naur shove,
 Tae lichten up wir daurkest nicht
 Wi' luvly lichts o' luve;
 Frae Simprin's semple unity
 Tae Ettrick's sary schism,
 Cam he whase haly habit wes
 A quiet heroism.

IX

Frae Simprin doun tae Ettrick groun',
 Cam he wha froond on fate,
 Wi' sermon-notes he'd wark intae
 His fawsont *Fourfold State*;
 Cam he wha tocht fair truths he faund
 Close tae charmin' Yarrow,
 Frae Simprin doun tae Ettrick toun
 Wi' Ed. Fisher's *Marrow*.

X

Frae Simprin's stell tae Ettrick's fell,
 Wi' crummock, cran, an' creel,
 Cam wir haly-herted herdsman,
 A cheerfu', Christly chiel;
 Cam wir pilgrim Thomas Boston,
 Wi' scrip, wi' purse, wi' gad,
 Tae Ettrick's fell frae Simprin's stell,
 On a kirkly *Iliad*.

XI

Frae Simprin's days tae Ettrick's ways,
 Cam he wha'd nick his nock
 By stappin' snarlin' hungry wolves
 Frae savagin' his flock;
 Frae Simprin's Ha' tae Ettrick's Kirk,
 I' coat o' best braid-claithe,
 Cam he wha widna iver tak'
 The Abjuration Aith.

XII

Frae Simprin's hert tae Ettrick's saul,
 Tae fauld an' feed stray sheep,
 Cam wir weel-shooned Simprin shepherd
 Owre snawy drifts sae deep;
 Cam wir guidly Thomas Boston
 Tae share wir croce an' croon,
 An' clamb wir pickle poupit staps
 I' auld Geneva goon.

XIII

Frae Simprin's lea tae Ettrick's See,
A Maister o' a' Airts,
Cam wir wise wan, Thomas Boston,
A man o' mony pairts;
Cam wir kintra-luvin' cleric,
A warlock wi' his wurd,
A fisherman, a fairmer's fere,
A fancier o' burds.

XIV

The first nicht we sate doun tae tak'
Christ's haly Breid an' Wine,
We noombed ainly saxty roond
Wir weel-degreed divine.
Twa decades efter thon daurk nicht,
We'd amaist eicht hunder,
I' Ettrick Kirk, wha hymned wir Host
I' worshipfu' wonder.

XV

He cauterized wir cads an' coofs,
An' catechized wir ying,
An' tocht us a' some psalm-like sangs
We nivver ivver sing;
For mony years wir shepherd wed
Ettrick lads an' lassies,
An' laid wir sheep and lambies doun
Aneath Ettrick grasses.

XVI

Stravaigin' owre wir Ettrick braes,
Readin' Fisher's *Marrow*,
Hymnin' awa' ae paraphrase,
Fishin' i' yon Yarrow,
Frae Simprin doun tae Ettrick toun,
Cam he whase rare leisure
Wes spent i' what his wife wud ca'
Ordinairie pleasure.

XVII

Frae Ettrick up tae Perth, ae time,
By Laird A'michty bid,
Wir shepherd gaed tae dae Kirk-wark
Wi' a' wir unco guid;
An' there up north, i' fair auld Perth,
A'—safir him—waur trembly
At what wes comin' up afore
Wir General Assembly.

XVIII

Commissioners gat up an' gied
 Thir thochts o' this an' that,
 An' socht sae hard tae haud thir dog
 Awa' frae ony cat;
 Bit some gat up an' spittit oot
 I' fiery wurd an' leuks,
 Whyles Thomas Boston woond his wye
 I' bonniest o' beuks.

XIX

Tam didna rise tae blast awa'
 At thae wha freathed an' fumed,
 Bit wi' sonderin' wisdom ee'd
 The beukie whilk he thoombed.
 Thir war o' wurd wox wurdier
 Owre *Auchterarder's Creed*,
 Yit wir pawkie Ettrick shepherd
 Jist keepit a cool heid.

XX

I' Perth wir auld Scots Kirk condemned
 Yon *Auchterarder Creed*,
 Yit wir Mess John wasna wi' it
 I' what it had decreed.
 Sae whan wir Moderator ruled,
 Tam tauld a fere frae Creiff
 A' about Ed. Fisher's *Marrow*
 Tae fatten up belief.

XXI

Thon fere frae Creiff teuk up the torch,
 Than fired anither ten,
 Wha wi' wir Thomas Boston made
 Twal merrie *Marrow* men,
 Twal merrie *Marrow* men wha daed
 The wark that keepit bricht
 Thru a' wir lan', like auld John Knox,
 John Calvin's caunel-licht.

XXII

Wir shepherd left the Kirk up north
 Tae pick Perth's bane for years,
 Bit brochtit back tae Ettrick earth
 The *Marrow* tae wir cheers;
 We couldna ivver understaund
 His faes kick up sic fuss,
 I' Ettrick we supportit him
 Wha'd representit us.

XXIII

Wir Border bodies treated him
Wi' transports o' delight,
An' Presbyterie weelcomed him
Es if he waur a knight;
Bit wir cannie Thomas Boston
Jist settled down agen
Tae live an' lip his luve o' God
Afore ungodlie men.

XXIV

Whan Katie, far frae Simprin's nest,
Gaed wild wan day ae Spring,
Her husband, like a hirpled burd,
Begouth tae trail a wing;
Yit still he filled his hauns an' heid
Wi' wark that healed his hert,
An' keepit him frae grawn intae
A dreichy introvert.

XXV

He wrate i' Lallans, English, Scots,
I' Hebrew, French, an' Greek;
Yit talkit wi' grawn-ups an' tots
The language o' God's meek;
His beuks waur bocht by thrangs o' fock,
An' lo'ed by every Scot,
Especially *The Mystery*. . . .
An' *The Crook in the Lot*.

XXVI

He warked sae hard upo' ae beuk
Tae help Hebrew-luvers,
Bit naethin' cam o' what he pat
Atween its twa covers;
Thon Massoretic pointin' o'
The haly Hebrew tongue
Hed suggestit tae wir shepherd
Ideas yit unsung.

XXVII

Ae pinefu' burnin' i' his breist
Aince kept wir shepherd hame,
Sae we gaithered i' his gairdin'
Unner the haly Name;
An' frae the winnock o' his manse
He preached—wi' lively fear—
Tae Ettrick fock, an' ithers tae,
Wha'd cam frae far an' near.

XXVIII

Frae Ettrick, i' ae day i' May,
 O' Seventeen-Thretty-Twa,
 Wir brawest preacher o' the lot
 Gaed gracefu'y awa'.
 We fauldit him—kirkyairdielike—
 Whaur Border bodies weep,
 Jist anither Ettrick shepherd
 Wi' a' his lambs an' sheep.

XXIX

Aneath wir Ettrick ait-green grass,
 I' Ettrick gowden clay,
 Wi' patriarchs o' fowre-score years
 An' littlins o' a day,
 We laid him down, i' howdumbdeid,
 Nae tee deep naur narrow,
 Rememberin' thir auld Perth bane,
 Mindfu' o' his marrow.

XXX

Border lads an' Border lassies,
 Gie God yir guidly praise,
 For bonniest o' shepherds, than,
 Wha cam wir Ettrick ways;
 For wir parson, Thomas Boston,
 An' wir poet, James Hogg,
 Wha turned wir toun, noo lang syne gaun,
 Intae a Tir-nan-og.

GLOSSARY

A', all
aboon, above
ae, a, or one
afore, before
aften, often
ain, own
aince, once
ainly, only
ainswer, answer
Airts, Arts
ait-green, oat-green
Aith, Oath. (*The Abjuration Oath was required by an Act passed by the British Parliament in 1712. It was an oath abjuring the Pretender, and was aimed at the safeguarding of the Queen. It made Protestant*

succession to the crown secure, and also prevented the disturbing of those of the Episcopal communion in predominantly Presbyterian Scotland, in the exercise of their religious worship.)
alane, alone
amaist, almost
an', and
aneath, beneath
anither, another
atween, between
Auchterarder Creed, "It is not sound and orthodox to teach that we must forsake sin in order to our coming to Christ, and instating us in covenant with God." A some-

what harsh, roundabout, ambiguous and prosaic attempt to say:

*Just as I am, and waiting not
To rid my soul of one dark blot, . . .*

O Lamb of God, I come.

*auld, old
awa', away*

*Bane, bone
begouth, began
beuk, book
bocht, bought*

Boston, Thomas, a Scottish minister of religion who was born at Duns, a small Lowland town on the edge of the lovely and lonely Lammermuir range of hills, on March 17, 1676, and died at Ettrick, in Selkirkshire, on May 20, 1732. He came of good, strong Covenanting stock. He had no difficulty in remembering his father's imprisonment in Duns Jail as a nonconformist, for the four-year-old boy had to keep John Boston company at least one whole night, maybe more, in his cell. Thomas Boston was successively schoolmaster at Glencairn, after graduating from Edinburgh University as M.A., tutor and chaplain to the family of Fletcher of Aberlady and the royally-descended family of Bruce of Kennet, minister of Simprin, in Berwickshire, and Ettrick. In addition to his best-known work, *The Fourfold State*, one of the religious classics of evangelical and Calvinistic theology, he wrote other original and once very widely-read books, such as *The Mystery of Christ in the Form of a Servant*, *The Crook in the Lot*, *The Christian Life Delineated*, *Soliloquy on the Art of Man-Fishing*, *A View of This and the Other World*, *A View of the Covenant of Grace*, etc. His learned treatise on the Massoretic pointing of the Hebrew Text of the Old Testament, under the title *Thomas Boston, ecclesiae Atricensis apud Scotos pastoris, Tractatus Stigmologicus, Hebraeo-Biblicus. Quo Accentuum Hebraeorum doctrina traditur, variusque eorum, in explananda S. Scriptura,*

usus exponitur. Cum praefatione viri reverendi & clarissimi Davidii Millii, was published in Amsterdam, in 1738, six years after his death. We have no knowledge of any scholars of repute endorsing his view that the Hebrew accents were of divine origin and carried a mystical meaning. Schultens and Grenobius, two learned Hebraists of the time, examined what had been put into their hands by an Englishman, Sir Richard Ellys, and gave as their judgment: "The Author has given surprising instances of the usefulness of the accents to settle the meaning of the text; and in the supposition that the rest of the book is equal to this sketch, it will, on the whole, be the best book that has been written on the subject." The book, although its author at the time of its writing was generally allowed to be the best Hebrew scholar in the Scotland of his day, was a failure. Boston also took a leading part in the Courts of the Scottish Kirk in what was known as the "Marrow Controversy," regarding the merits of an English book by a certain Edward Fisher, M.A., of Oxford, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, which he defended doughtily against the attacks of the "Moderate" party in the Church. His autobiography, *A General Account of My Life*, which was edited by G. D. Lowe and re-published in London as recently as 1908, is a lively, interesting, and enlightening record of Scottish life in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. It is full of sincerity and tenderness and, for all its quaintness and quietness, not by any means devoid of humorous touches, intentional and otherwise.

*braes, hillslopes
braid-claithe, broad-cloth
braw, Handsome
Braid, Bread
breist, breast
bricht, bright
brochtit, brought
burd, bird*

Ca', call
callant, fellow (used fondly)
cam, came
cannie, shrewd
caunel-licht, candle-light
chiel, young man
clamb, climb
condamned, condemned
coofs, fools
couldna, could not
couthie, kindly
cran, a tripod to put a pot upon
creel, a wicker-basket
croce, a cross
croom, a crown
crummock, a shepherd's staff, or
 crook

Daed, did
daurin', daring
daurk, dark
delicht, delight
didna, did not
divine, a minister of religion
dominie, a schoolmaster
down, down
dreichy, dreary

Ee'd, eyed
efter, after
eicht, eight
es, as

Fae, foe
fairmer, farmer
fauld, fold
fauldit, folded
faund, found
fawsont, orderly
fere, friend, comrade
fock, folk
frae, from
freaded, frothed
froond, frowned

Gad, fishing-rod
gaed, went
gairdin', garden
gat, got
gaun, gone
gie, give
gied, gave
goon, gown
gowden, golden
gawn, growing
gawn-ups, adults
groun', ground, soil, earth
guidly, goodly

Ha', Hall
halesome, wholesome, healthy
haly, holy
haly-heried, holy-hearted
haud, hold
hauns, hands
hed, had
heid, head, mind
hert, heart
heuk, a hook
hirpled, hobbled, walked with a limp
Hogg, James, (1770-1835) the
 "Ettrick Shepherd" poet who came
 of a race of shepherds, and began
 life by herding cows until he was
 old enough to be trusted with
 sheep. Hogg, who was a friend
 of Sir Walter Scott, wrote romantic
 tales and poetry; his works
 include *Border Minstrelsy*, *Scottish
 Pastorals*, *The Poetic Mirror*, *The
 Queen's Wake*, *The Pilgrims of the
 Sun*, *Madoc of the Moor*, *The
 Private Memoirs and Confessions
 of a Justified Sinner*, in which one
 on the main characters draws the
 antinomian conclusion that as an
 "elect and justified person" he
 cannot sin, and consequently that,
 no matter how wicked it may seem,
 nothing that he does can really be
 sinful once he has been accepted by
 the Lord, *Winter Evening Tales*,
 etc. He was steeped in the ballad
 lore and folk tales of his Border
 hill-country. "Skylark," "The Vill-
 age of Balmaquhapple," a riotous
 absurdity, which employs grotes-
 que exaggeration, and has a
 touch of the "ballads of impos-
 sibilities" about it, "Donald
 McGillavry," and "Kilmenny," are
 four of his best-known poems.
 His poems "The Auld Man's
 Fareweel to His Wee House" and
 "The Author's Address to His
 Auld Dog Hector" are evidence
 that he was inspired by the poetry
 of Robert Burns. Hogg is a leading
 character, partly idealized, partly
 caricatured, in John Wilson's
 well-known *Noctes Ambrosianae*.
howdumbdeid, dead of night
hunder, hundred

I', in
intae, into

ithers, others
ivver, ever

Jist, just, only

Kiltit, kilted, clad in tartan dress
kintra-fock, country-folk
kintra-luvin', country-loving
kirk, church
kirkly, churchly, religious in aspect
kirkyardielike, churchyard-like,
funerally
kist, chest, strong-box
knicht, knight
Laird A'michty, Lord Almighty
Lallans, a Lowland Scots *patois*
lambies, little lambs
lan', land
lang, long
lear, lore, or learning
leuks, looks
lichten, illumine
licht, lights
littlins, very small children, babies
lo'ed, loved
luve, love

Maister, Master
mak', make
makar, maker, or poet
Mess John, parish minister
mony, many
muckle, very much

Nae, not, or no
naethin', nothing
naur, or
nick, score
nivver, never
Nocht, Figure O, Naught, Zero
nock, notch
noo, now
noombered, numbered

O', of
ony, any
ordinairie, ordinary
owre, over

Pat, put
pairs, parts
parritch-pat, oatmeal porridge-pot
pawkie, shrewd, (of humour) dry
pickle, few
pinefu', painful
pock, bag

pointin', Hebrew language vowel
signs
poupit, pulpit

Represeatit, represented
roond, round

Sae, so
saif, except, save
sangs, songs

sary, sorry, pitiable. Ettrick was a torn parish when Boston arrived on the scene. A four years' ministerial vacancy had wrought havoc. Every hamlet in the upper valley had its Cameronians and Separatists, and the common talk was all of separation, and of the lawfulness of attending services in the parish church. After eight years of work and prayer at Ettrick he told his wife one day, "My heart is alienated from this place." At times he was filled with a longing to leave, but it was characteristic of his large and loyal heart that the sight of the plight of his parishioners subdued his restlessness. Slowly and surely, however, his influence grew, and such preaching and pastoral work as his began to tell. He eventually won the stubborn loyalty and rough love of his rustic parishioners.

sate, sat
saul, soul
sauntly, saintly
savagin', savaging
saxty, sixty
semple, simple

sic, such
sma', small. What a tiny House of God the Simprin church must have been! From all that remained of the ruins at the turn of this century, the crumbling east gable, it was gauged that only five short steps took a worshipper from wall to wall, and twenty from end to end. Yet it was ample for the Simprin flock, for there were only 88 examinable folk out of a total population of 143 souls. Ettrick, to which Boston went in 1707, was a very much bigger parish, numerically and geographically. It stretched ten miles in every direc-

tion, taking in the upper valley of Etrick Water, with its tributaries the Tima and Rankleburn, and the wide lonely hills which roll away northward to Moffat Water and Yarrow. Southward the Etrick countryside rippled over, by Flodden Field, into the heights of Cheviot. Most of the hamlets that made up the "toun" of Etrick have long ago vanished, but the valley parish, in Boston's day, had a population of nearly a thousand, and 777 of them took communion-tokens from Thomas Boston's trembling hands when he served them the Lord's Supper for the last time in his life. Most of his parishioners were also present, in the garden, to hear him preach his final sermon from his death-bed, through the open manse-window, on the characteristically-chosen theme of self-examination.

snarlin', snarling
snawy, snowy
socht, sought, searched
sodger, soldier
spittit, spat out
stappin', stopping, preventing
staps, steps
stell, stall, small shelter
stravaigin', rambling around aimlessly
streek, stretch
supportit, supported

Tae, to
taen, taken
tak', take
talkit, talked
Tam, Tom, diminutive of Thomas
tauld, told
tee, too
tene, sorrow, woe
teuk, took
thae, they, or those
than, then
thingumagig, a queer contraption one cannot remember how to designate
thir, their, or these
thochts, thoughts
thon, that, or yonder
thoomed, thumbed
*thrang*s, throngs

Thretty-Twa, Thirty-Two

Tir-nan-og, paradise; Gaelic expression meaning "Land of the young", i.e. "Land of (eternal) youth" (pronounced *Cheer-nan-og*)

tocht, taught

tots, little children

twa, two

twa, twelve. To be numbered among the *Twelve Marrow Men* were John Drummond, the minister from Crieff, who sat next to Boston at the Perth Assembly, James Hog, the Carnock minister who persuaded a Scottish publisher to re-issue Edward Fisher's *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, which was first published in London in 1646, and Ebenezer and Ralph Erskine, the sons of the Rev. Henry Erskine, who had been instrumental in the conversion of Boston when a boy of eleven. In his noble little book, *Soliloquy on Man-Fishing*, Boston describes the event delightfully and quaintly. "Little wast thou thinking, O my soul," he writes, remembering well how he was caught, hook, line, and sinker, "on Christ, heaven, or thyself, when thou went to the Newton of Whitsome to hear a preaching, when Christ first dealt with thee; there thou got an unexpected cast." The *Marrow Controversy* which raged for many years, ended when the twelve petitioning protesters were roundly rebuked by the Assembly in 1722. "I received the rebuke," wrote Boston, "as an ornament being for the cause of truth." The end, however, was only the beginning of a great awakening in the spiritual life of the Church of Scotland which resulted, eleven years later, in the first Secession from the Kirk led by Ebenezer Erskine upon whom, at the death of Thomas Boston, in 1732, the mantle of leadership in the evangelical movement had fallen.

Unco guid, the unusually good

unner, under

upo', upon

Wan, one
wark, work
warlock, wizard
wasna, was not
waur, were
weanies, small children
weelcomed, welcomed
weel-degreed, well-accredited academically
weel-shooned, well-shoed, well-shod
wes, was
wha, who
wha'd, who had
whan, when
whase, whose
whaur, where

St. Louis, *Missouri*

whilk, which
whyles, whilst, while
wir, our
woond, wended, wound
wox, waxed
wrate, wrote
wurd, word
wurdier, wordier, more verbose
wye, way

Ying, young
yit, yet
yon, that

Zed, last letter of the English alphabet