



William Topaz McGonagall

## Riyadh's Caledonian Society hold an evening of Poetry readings to celebrate the 99th anniversary of Scotlands least remembered Poet

Those of us born south of the border, may be forgiven for not knowing of William Topaz McGonagall, Dundee's best remembered nobody. He was a man without talent who thought he was a great poet and tragedian and only needed an opportunity to prove it. This made him the perfect target for practical jokers who abounded in his day. He was engaged to give entertainments in small halls just so his audience could make a goat of him. His teetotal drink was spiked with alcohol.

McGonagall had passed middle life before he got the idea he had been visited by the muse. He was born in Edinburgh in 1825 and grew up in Dundee, to which his father moved in search of work. William also laboured long hours in the weaving trade.

All his life he was the butt of cruel jokes, but his faith in himself could not be shaken. His remains were dropped into a paupers' grave just over 99 years ago, but his memory holds up. All his poems have been published and so are there to be judged: they have, if nothing else, the quality of inimitability.

McGonagall claims a place on library shelves because his indomitable spirit appealed to authors and essayists. He made a number of courageous journeys, courageous in respect they were made by a person whose means were generally nil. He went to Balmoral, 50 odd miles, on foot, in the hope of seeing Queen Victoria. He got no further than the gate and was told never to come back. To London, then by sea, lured by forged invitations and, to cap it all, to New York, crossing the ocean in the steerage class and arriving with eight shillings. The streets of New York were not paved with gold for him, and in no time he was appealing to a Dundee benefactor to get him back home

But enough of the history lesson, How did the evening go?... The answer I'm afraid was that you had to be there to appreciate it!

For those of you who missed this magnificent event, herewith a sample of McGonagall's fine work; a short poem entitled:

### Montrose

Beautiful town of Montrose,  
I will not commence my lay,  
And I will write in praise of thee without dismay,  
And in spite of all your foes,  
I will venture to call thee Bonnie Montrose.  
Your beautiful Chain Bridge  
is magnificent to be seen,  
Spanning the river Esk,  
a beautiful tidal stream,  
Which abounds with trout and salmon,  
Which can be had for the catching  
without any gammon.

Then as for the Mid Links,  
it is most beautiful to be seen,  
And I'm sure is a very nice bowling green,  
Where young men can enjoy themselves  
and inhale the pure air,  
Emanating from the sea  
and the beautiful flowers there,  
And as for the High Street,  
it's most beautiful to see,  
There's no street can surpass  
it in the town of Dundee,  
Because it is so long and wide,  
That the people can pass on either side  
Without jostling one another or  
going to any bother.

Beautiful town of Montrose, near by the seaside,  
With your fine shops and streets so wide,  
'Tis health for the people that in you reside,  
Because they do inhale the pure fragrant air,  
Emanating from the pure salt wave  
and shrubberies growing there;  
And the inhabitants of Montrose  
ought to feel gay,  
Because it is one of the bonniest towns  
in Scotland at the present day.

For more information on joining The Caledonian Society contact: RGBB Members  
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### A few gems from the William McGonagall Appreciation Society:

As I was walkin'  
doon the road  
I saw a coo,  
A bull by Goad!

Oh! Beautiful city of Glasgow.  
With your steam reciprocating engin's  
At the building of which,  
Your men get many singsins.

When the moon is upside doon,  
The fishes swim from Ayr to Troon.  
But when the moon is fresh and fair,  
The fishes swim from Troon to Ayr.

A chicken is a noble beast,  
The cow is much forlornier;  
Standing in the pouring rain,  
With a leg at every corner.