



Hugh's News

Magazine of
The Friends of Hugh Miller

Issue No 43
May 2020

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WILD SCOTLAND'S WONDERS BROUGHT TO THE PAGE

by The Editor

"Absolute delight" is the response of Larissa Reid, the organiser and judges' chair, to the quality of the entries - in record numbers - to the latest Hugh Miller Writing Competition. Entrants were asked to take their themes from the '51 Best Places to See Scotland's Geology' chosen by the Scottish Geodiversity Forum, and they did just that, with pieces on subjects inspired by Orkney, Caithness, Assynt, the Argyll islands, the Cairngorms, and other locations, including of course, Cromarty itself.

Larissa commented: "We received almost three times our usual number of entries, with a significant boost to under-18 entry numbers, and I am particularly thrilled by their work. It really has been a very successful year for the competition, which is wonderful news given the strange times we are living in."

Highlights included the inaugural Middleton-Miller Prize for promising young writer (18-25), won by PhD student Jack Cooper with his poem on Siccar Point, entitled Testimony of the Rocks, taken from the title of Hugh's last work. It is a cracker with a devastating punchline. The under-18 winners were selected based on their atmospheric descriptions of place and landscape, rather than strictly their knowledge of geology. The Friends of Hugh Miller welcomes this given Hugh's overall love of the natural world.

Claire Rinterknecht, a "Scottish lass" now living in France, won the poetry first prize in this category, with a lovely poem, *The Standing Stones of Stenness*, showing, says Larissa, "remarkable maturity and skill."

It is almost impossible to sum up all the other prose and poetry by the youngest writers, but The Friends feel we owe a special thanks for her encouragement to Fortrose English teacher Karen Meikle resulting in an astonishing number of entries from her first year class. Similarly, Emma McCallum at Cromarty Primary entered pieces by a number of her pupils. And the same difficulty in summarising applies to the

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Cromarty Foreshore © Bob Davidson

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WILD SCOTLAND'S WONDERS

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adults, whether, in prose, it be Anna Fleming's *Moving with Granite* as she grapples with the "Savage Split" climb in the Cairngorms, or Rhona Steel's *Pilgrimages of Wonder* to "a lick of pink" rock on the shores of Assynt made by generations of her family Or, in poetry, Alison Cohen revelling in the conglomerate bedrock of the Highland Boundary Fault, Balmaha. Or there is the fiction winner, *Cinder Toffee*, by the Black Isle's Vee Walker, an imagining of Peach and Horne's dispute with Archibald Geikie, known as the Highland Controversy. It seems unfair not to give at least

some essence here of the high standards too in the second and third prizes, and the highly commended in their various categories, but *Hugh's News* hopes to publish as many of them as we can in ensuing editions. In the meantime, you can read the whole lot now at www.scottishgeology.com/hughmiller. Larissa muses: "I often wonder what Hugh Miller himself would have made of 'his' competition: it is always such a treat to read through the diverse, entertaining and beautifully crafted work that is submitted."



Foss Alive

Competition Winners

OUR PENS OF MOST DISTINCTION

Here we proudly announce the outstanding pieces of writing in all categories. Since the Friends are Cromarty based, we cannot resist being slightly parochial, and inform you that five of them are based on Hugh Miller's doorstep - pupils of Fortrose Academy on the Black Isle - plus one entry from Cromarty Primary School (all marked with an asterisk*). The five judges were: Larissa Reid, Jane Verburg, Simon Cuthbert, Elsa Panciroli, Kenny Taylor.

Under-18s:

Poetry

- 1st: The Standing Stones of Stenness
Claire Rinterknecht
- 2nd: Spey Bay through the Seasons
Adela Margallo
- 3rd: Cairngorms
*Penny Capewell **
- Highly-commended:
Hugh Miller Limerick
*Charlie Torley**
- The Heart of Neolithic Orkney
*Mia Chisholm**

Prose

- 1st: Luing
*Kate Knight **
- 2nd: The Isle of Staffa
Daisy Stewart Henderson
- 3rd: Smoo Cave: A Natural Wilderness
*Rebekah Macpherson**
- Highly commended: The Mermaid's Stone
*Bay Rochford**

Middleton-Miller Prize for Promising Young Writer

(age 18-25 category)

- The Testimony of the Rocks (Siccar Point)
Jack Cooper

Adult entries:

Poetry

- 1st: Highland Boundary Fault, Balmaha
Alison Cohen
- Highly-commended:
A Stone's Throw from Easdale
Carol Shea
- The 'Old Man' Teeters
Stuart Graham

Fiction

- 1st: Cinder Toffee
Vee Walker

Non-Fiction

- 1st: Moving with Granite
Anna Fleming
- Highly-commended: Pilgrimages of Wonder
Rhona Steel

The following bodies sponsor the Hugh Miller Writing Competition:

Scottish Geodiversity Forum – scottishgeodiversityforum.org
 The Friends of Hugh Miller – thefriendsofhughmiller.org.uk
 British Geological Survey (BGS) – <https://www.bgs.ac.uk/>
 Geopoetry 2020 – <https://www.geolsoc.org.uk/geopoetry20>
 Dynamic Earth – dynamicearth.co.uk
 Edinburgh Geological Society – edinburghgeolsoc.org
 Scottish Centre for Geopoetics – geopoetics.org.uk

Lochaber Geopark – lochabergeopark.org.uk
 Cromarty Arts Trust – cromartyartstrust.org.uk
 The Hunterian, Glasgow – www.gla.ac.uk/hunterian/
 Mr Woods Fossils – www.mrwoodsossils.co.uk
 The National Museums Scotland – www.nms.ac.uk
 The National Trust for Scotland – www.nts.org.uk



Hugh Miller Museum & Birthplace Cottage



The Stables

OUR MISSION CONTINUES

by The Editor

Readers will be aware of the National Trust for Scotland's announcement on 12th May concerning its colossal losses arising from the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown. Its CEO, Simon Skinner, says they have placed its very survival in jeopardy. The loss of around £74 million in revenues and investment income has forced the Trust to put 429 staff at risk of redundancy. It is making a direct appeal to grant funders and to the Scottish Government for financial support, and launching an emergency fundraising appeal, which will be the largest it has ever undertaken

It plans, once lockdown restrictions are eased, to carry out phased re-opening of 27 built heritage properties, primarily those best able to accommodate social distancing, with the aim of opening a further 18 sometime next year. All the rest will be placed on a care and maintenance basis, with the aim of reopening "once there is a general upturn in the economy and the Trust's fortunes."

This means that our own beloved property, Hugh Miller Birthplace Cottage and Museum (HMB-CM) is one of the many now operating on a care and maintenance basis, and will remain closed to the public in effect indefinitely, given the Trust's understandably vague expectations for the future.

Property manager Dr Alix Powers-Jones has been assured her job is safe. She tells us: "I have been furloughed now until 1st July, at which point I anticipate returning to work and pick up the background work towards the ('Miller Retold') refurbishment plans."

The Friends of Hugh Miller will continue as normal, including working on proposals for the refurbishment. A set of proposals is now being considered by our team of specialists, and these will be circulated in due course to the whole membership for comment before their submission to the Trust. We cannot, however, state with any certainty at this stage when or whether the project will go ahead, but we intend to do all we can to ensure its progress to completion. As an associated Friends group within the Trust, we are committed under our Constitution to continue our support for the Museum in whatever ways possible.

AGM DATE SET

We have provisionally booked a venue and date for our 14th Annual Meeting. It is **10th October** (Hugh Miller's birthday!) at **The Stables, Cromarty**.

The management committee hope that by the autumn, travel and other restrictions will have been eased, but foresee the continuation of social distancing. The Stables is a larger venue than our usual one, The Brewery, chosen just because it has bigger capacity, although a limitation on attendance may be required because of the distancing factor. If it is not possible to meet physically on 10th October, we will endeavour to hold some kind of "virtual" event by digital means. The agenda will be circulated to you all up to two weeks in advance. It will include the same items as we were put down for discussion at the AGM on 16th May.

Items for debate will include

- The Museum 'Miller Retold' project.
 - 'Eliza's Path project (now also paused).
 - Writing Competition.
 - Nigel Trewin lecture.
 - Office-bearers reports.
 - Election of office-bearers.
-

TREWIN LECTURE

As of going to press this month, it is hoped that the second Trewin Memorial Lecture scheduled for 25th September, and due to be given by Dr Nick Fraser at the NMS Auditorium, Chambers St, Edinburgh, will still go ahead (under restrictions).

Members will be informed in good time about this, one way or the other.



NOW YOU CAN FIND US ON YOUTUBE!

by Martin Gostwick



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RqjcAFKNj4c>



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iZxkD1UtwyA&t=17s>

Our most enterprising events organiser Gavin Berkenheger has put out The Friends' message on Youtube, with not just one, but two postings. You can visit the first at 'The Friends of Hugh Miller Fossil Collection Inverness Science Festival (ISF) 2020.' Gavin filmed the piece lasting 7:18 minutes in the garden of his Muir of Ord family home, showcasing many of our finest specimens.

He rightly credits Calum Anton of Fortrose as donor of the core items, supplemented by some of his own finds. He submitted it to this year's International Science Festival (ISF), so it could be one of its digital displays. And he singles out as a "prize" item the *Diplacanthus* fossil found by "an 8-year-old boy," Calum's great nephew Leon Chapman, whose thankyou letter to The Friends is published below.

This Youtube post can in fact serve as a perfect introduction not only to our collection, but to The Friends of Hugh Miller as an organisation, and I would encourage members and readers who have not yet had a chance to view it to do so by this means.

A second Youtube entry is *How Fossils are Made (for Kids)*, lasting 9:47 minutes, for which Gavin enlisted the participation of his daughters Connevieve and Sarina, showing them the process via some ingenious home-made props.

For good measure, his wife Marina posted it on her Facebook page too, and the local preschool class were viewing it. Again, it would make an ideal starter course for other parents.

To view these posts, in the Youtube search bar enter:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RqjcAFKNj4c>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iZxkD1UtwyA&t=17s>

Or simply visit the Friends' Facebook page via the button at the top of our website.

Letter to the Editor

CHANONRY FOSSIL DISCOVERY

Dear Martin

It has now been nearly four years since I went beach combing with great uncle Calum (Anton). He was sure that there would be nothing inside it. I threw away lots of other rocks I found that day, but decided to keep "the one." It was the holes in the rock that drew me to it in the first place and I just had a feeling that it might be something special. When we got back to Calum's house and broke it open, we really couldn't believe it!! Imagine that. A 350 million-year-old fish just waiting to be discovered. I phoned my mum straight away and told her the news. She couldn't believe it either! I am so pleased that my fossil is on display at the Hugh Miller Museum and that it is going out and about to other museums and displays. Next time we are up to see Uncle Calum we will definitely call in and be a VIP for the day.

Yours sincerely,

Leon Chapman, 24 Lovat Meadow Close, Newport Pagnell, MILTON KEYNES



The Diplacanthus fossil found by Leon

Editor's footnote: Leon's amazing find at Chanonry Point below Fortrose is in fact part of The Friends of Hugh Miller's fossil collection, and is proudly taken by us among other specimens to earth science events.

The Middletons

A GREAT CROMARTY FAMILY

by Martin Gostwick

Now that they have given their name to a literary prize, it is only right to acknowledge this and many of the Middleton family's other contributions to Hugh Miller's legacy.

Middletons have farmed in Cromarty parish since 1790, and nine generations of the family have farmed continuously at Rosefarm since the 1800s.

The Middleton/Miller connection began when Hugh and Lydia Miller's granddaughter Lydia (1864-1934) married Thomas Middleton, in 1889. Thomas was born at Rosefarm in 1863, his father being the tenant farmer there. Thomas went on to become a renowned agriculturalist and was knighted in 1918 for his outstanding services to agriculture. He finally bought Rosefarm in 1923.

His son, Brigadier Alastair Middleton, a career soldier who served in both World Wars, took over the farm on his retirement in 1945 and ran it with his daughter Bright - thus continuing the line of Middletons at Rosefarm into the seventh generation. Bright's grandson, John Gordon, is now the ninth generation running Rosefarm - and still a direct descendant of Hugh and Lydia Miller!

Brigadier Middleton's wife, Winifred, was a Salvesen from the great shipping company of that name, and as Mrs Middleton, she is still vividly remembered in Cromarty today. She founded "Middie's play group" which is still going strong as Cromarty Bairns. She was a great supporter of the town's lifeboat, the Red Cross, and the East Kirk where for many years she arranged the flowers she provided from the farm's gardens.

Members of the play group in her time fondly recall her as "a disciplinarian, but good to us." Around 10 youngsters would gather in her dilapidated caravan on the beach below Rosefarm, and go swimming in the Firth. "Middie" herself swam in the Firth regularly almost until the day she died aged 90.

The Brigadier and Mrs Middleton had four daughters, Marian (Merrie), Beatrice (Bright), Lydia and Rosemary. Bright ran Rosefarm until her death in 2010, and was famed as a tattie-grower internationally. In true Middleton tradition, she too became a respected agriculturalist, and was awarded an MBE in 1987 for her services to agriculture in Cromarty. She continued her mother's habit of providing flowers from the Rosefarm gardens for the church - and for Hugh Miller's Birthplace Cottage.

Frieda Gostwick, property manager at the time, fondly remembers the displays Bright provided round the Cottage on the occasion of Prince Charles's visit in 1994.

The Middleton Miller Prize for promising young writer (aged 18-25) is particularly appropriate coming from a succession of Miller descendants who have all been talented writers. The line started of course with Hugh and Lydia Miller themselves. Lydia and her daughter Harriet Miller Davidson both wrote novels and children's books. Sir Thomas's wife, Lady Middleton, also named Lydia, wrote many children's books, as did her daughter Margaret.

The most significant enduring benefaction to Cromarty and the Hugh Miller Museum is the endowment, named the Middleton Fund, established in 2011, which keeps the Museum open, with a professional staff.

Alongside that is the Middleton Trust, started in 2012, to "advance the social, cultural, educational and recreational development of young people" in the Cromarty area. The Trust has funded the Middleton Miller prize.

Both were initiatives of Henry McKenzie Johnston in memory of his wife Marian (Merrie) Middleton, and in thanks for the generations of Middletons of Rosefarm and all they have contributed to Cromarty over the centuries.

Many Middleton descendants are members of The Friends of Hugh Miller. In fact they form the core of our support. Our thanks to Merrie's daughter, our Patron Stephanie Kulesza, and Rosemary Airey for additional information.



Sisters Bright and Merrie in 1987. Bright on left is wearing her MBE medal for services to agriculture in Cromarty. Photo courtesy of Bright's daughter Anna Gordon.

Winner the Middleton-Miller prize

The Testimony of the Rocks*

Jack Cooper

From a pew of sandstone and greywacke,
I watch the tide fall from Siccar Point
like a shallow breath from scarred lungs.

Scotland; self-assembling cathedral,
I love your rough-hewn altars
dragged out the seafloor.
Like any man with an eye on the line
and a smile caught on his mouth like a hook,
the cliffs are at my back
and eternity stretches ahead
above
beneath.

Today, I will worship whatever I find
under the sky's soaring vault.
I will sit with the stone and sand,
listen to the waves
and what little God I have left



Siccar Point

* This is of course taken from the title of Miller's last book

Jack is very much involved in the poetry scene in the West Midlands of England. He is undertaking a PhD in embryonic cell migration at Warwick University. He says it is "very gratifying" to have won the Middleton-Miller prize. Without the competition, he would never have "spent weeks immersed in Scotland's remarkable geological history, or the life and work of its champion," and hopes his poem "inspires others to look into Scotland's past - whether two centuries ago, or two geologic eras."

Under 18s poetry first prize

The Standing Stones of Stenness

Claire Rinterknecht

My ocean blue dress sways
in the Orkney wind: clamorous, chilly, childlike.
It plays with my cropped hair, teasing.

Around me stand the Standing Stones of Stenness.
I am a Scottish lass surrounded by my ancestors.
They stand as tall as Dad seemed
when I dreamed of bows and arrows and thistle fairies.

The stones feel like Dad's chin, unshaven.
My pale fingertips touch the dark surface,
dappled with white and grey,
searching for the sand grain memories they have lost.



Standing Stones of Stenness cc-by-sa/2.0 - © Rob Farrow

The stones smell cold, of purple heather, of dewy grass,
of sheep droppings, and sea salt.
I stood here once with Dad and Mum
Jules and Yves, Brooklyn pulling on her lead.

We created memories I now try to catch with my pencil.
They swirl around me, still caught in the Orkney wind.
They dance the Gay Gordon, still in primary school,
practicing for the ceilidh.

We left Scotland and I hid my heart
in a circle of lost friends, of bitter thoughts,
of long French school days.
Jules is at uni now, Yves is no longer wee.
I have grown as well, am no longer a sweet willowy girl
who dreams of fairies.

Now I dream of the day I become a sandstone
of sand grain memories, dappled with white and grey.
I dream of standing again,
among the Standing Stones of Stenness.

Claire is based in France, and has already published several pieces of work. Her now established writing success is not surprising given this remarkable poem's sense of place, family, and the texture and colour of objects.

Adult poetry first prize

Highland Boundary Fault, Balmaha

Alison Cohen

Our marriage, named a fault, has held,
is marked with serpentinite for our engagement
and a wedding band inlaid with islands—
Inchmurrin, Creinch, Torrinch and Inchcailloch:
Avalonia loves Laurentia, graffitied in the rocks.

It was ruggedness I fell for and these shimmerings
of schist, transported to the lowlands of my lap,
crashing from the closing of Iapetus.
Our children have been labelled refugees, outsiders—
cobble hauled in torrents, reddened in the sand—
welcomed though by holly and by beech, roots entwined
together with conglomerate, bedrock of their home.

Now we're resting here a bit—observing a collapse
of all that for this instant has tickled us on our surface.

Alison Cohen lives in Glasgow. She started to write poetry in 2017 not long after her mother died and she retired from working as a psychoanalytic psychotherapist. It seems to be her way of continuing to grapple with saying something about life. She loves it for its rigour, its beauty and surprises and for the new friends and colleagues she is making.



Highland Boundary Fault cc-by-sa/2.0 - © Ian Mitchell

Prose highly commended

Pilgrimages of Wonder

Rhona Steel

1950s - Dad. He is on shift at the Scourie hotel in the morning, but the long summer days will give him plenty time for a stravaig en route. The car drops down past Eddrachilles and begins its slow ascent to Upper Badcall. A Bedford 16-seater bus is rumbling in low gears on its way south, so he pulls in to the passing place to let it past, two toots of the horn and waves from the driver and passengers alike. He scans Loch an Daimh Mor, sees fish nosing, chooses left and the car bounces along the untarred road and through a gate. A fine view of the bay to the south, a fishing boat hauling a wake of gulls, the diesel engine booms low and heavy off the hills. To the south, the mountains of Assynt are lined up, chessmen waiting for a divine hand. He remembers the musky book at the hotel that described the Moine Thrust and tectonics, older rocks lying on younger ones, and marvels at the great minds that made such discoveries in the centuries when religious belief lay at the soul of it all and time was deeper than he can fathom even now.

The front of high pressure from the east has lasted over a week now and it looks settled for the weekend. Perfect for exploring God's own country, he laughs aloud at the expression. He parks the car near the gnarly oaks that have been spared the sheep, walks past the last croft house with its collie dogs that nip the heels.

South east, through crofters' land, he lifts back into place the rusting bedstead that serves as a gate. He heads over crisp heather, following winding sheep tracks to the coast and this intriguing rock he has visited before. A lick of pink some 70 feet wide and 250 feet long spills down to the sea. It is hard and coarse to the touch and harder to understand. Studded with a profusion of greys and reds, swirls of whites, rusts and reds on adark background. Beauty too perfect, too complex to understand without study. He takes solace that here, among these patterns of rock, the sun glinting on sea, the warm wind at his back, the salt tantalising his senses, that he is closest to the marvels of the universe.

1970s - childhood. The tarpaulin covering the bags on the roof rack flaps in the wind, dislodged during the last ferry trip aboard the roll on roll off at Kylesku. The car rolls along, the family singing 'She'll be coming round the mountain' as a bright flash of post van trundles south, the postie tooting a thank you to us for pulling in at the passing place. 'How far is it now?' she asks, unsticking her legs from the hot plastic seats and trying not to need a pee. 'Just round the next corner,' the family choruses the party line. But this time, it is the last corner. She looks across Loch an Daimh Mor, spots an owl on a stone that flies off as they swing around the corner and head up over the cattle grid to the house at Upper Badcall. It's late, past tea-time, but the summer light makes it feel like lunchtime. Her brother slips on sharn in his excitement to be first to the house, to shoo the sheep invaders from the garden. They all make fun of his trousers, smeared with the fowl smelling stuff.

The Glasgow trade holidays: two glorious weeks of freedom and discovery. The first days are rainy, so dad teaches them to draw and they become adept in setting in

perspective the ruined barn and fir tree against the back drop of the bay with its fishing boats and islands. The wind howls up from the bay, but soon turns to the east, bringing high pressure to last the rest of the holidays with sweet smells of heather and peat. With each day's adventures, there is an underlying tale being told.

We picnic on the beaches, sand mixing with sandwiches, squinting at dad as he guides us through rocks with names you can eat. Pudding stone, all lumpy and round, studied with multicoloured fruits. Gneiss shot through with black bands of liquorice. As my sister the ghosthunter peers into weathered caves, I try tasting the black rocks for that sweet tangy taste, a childish mind missing the value of metaphor. We plead to be allowed into the Scourie village shop for 'Fruit Salad' and 'Black Jack' sweeties in exchange for our holiday pennies.

And one evening after tea, there's a lightness in the house and it is still warm enough for mum to suggest a walk. We wander with the dog along the road, past the windswept gnarly oaks, the goats with their devilish horns, and the colliedogs that nip the heels. Crossing over croft land, pulling open and closed wooden

gates and bedsteads, we wander towards the sea and I do not know who spots it first. Mum starts making barking noises that make us writhe with laughter, but the seal calls back. So begins this magical moment where time slows, sitting on a large band of pink rock which dad says is amongst the oldest on the planet and mum communing with a seal. Every time we think it has ducked and disappeared for good, she calls again and it resurfaces.

Now - you and I. You power down past the turn off to the Eddrachilles Hotel and fly up the hill, down through the gears in a racing change and up to the turn off to Upper Badcall. A fish lorry with Spanish plates thunders past on the road south, a full cargo from 'Bervie heading to the continent. You indicate left and scan Loch an Daimh Mor: I remember the rock with the owl. Around the corner, past the borrow pit, over the cattle grid, you pull in at the house, which my friend is renting, left the keys under the rock for us. A cat is on the window sill, unfaithful to its home a mile up the road. A grand view of the mountains of Assynt to the south, lunar shadows cast by strong sunshine against blue skies. Perhaps in your mind, these are subterranean beasts, diving and surfacing? In the bay below, a fish farm rib is heading back to shore, carving a wake, the outboard echoing off the hills.

I tell you dad had a summer job, working for a hotel and transport company, exporting fish to the London restaurants, until a lorry went skewwhiff at Scotch Corner, silver scales, fins and tails on the tarmac carriage-ways. An artistic study in fossils.

The high-pressure front is about to break, the wind has swung back to the south. Walking past the gnarly oaks, then following a path over croft land, man-made dykes travel in veins across the land, at times abutting the arteries of natural ones. You come upon one such dyke of quartz-dolerite, you say, sinking a low channel among the harder gneiss. Upon its last reaches, scrambling on the lichen covered rock, a dragon fly's wing nestles in a crevice. You've learned from a ranger on your child's school outing that some species live for but a day. Hatch, mature, mate and die all in a spin of the earth. There's a rock pool, big enough to immerse yourself in. Looking past your reflection on the surface, you make out a universe of anemones, kelp, a star fish, waiting for high tide. Nearer the coast, that band of pink rock, nearly as old as the earth. We wonder at what that means.

We still rely on metaphors to understand: if the rock metaphors speak of food on the table, the formations describe the arrival of unwanted dinner guests: intrusion, swarm, thrust. To the north, the new roadbuilders have made a grand job of the cutaway. Drilled and blasted until a slice of earth tells its story to the inquisitive, on their North Coast 500 adventures. The raw land reveals light muscovite and quartz against dark hornblende and biotite: a recipe for liquorice for all to see.

Turning east at Laxford, named by the Norse after the salmon that were plentiful there even in my childhood. You fancy climbing Arkle, and at the top we find pipe rock, fossilised burrowing creatures from the lapetus sea, they reckon. And here we sit, with the distant booming of the bombs on Cape Wrath, wondering at it all.

The future. And when we are gone or too old to make our pilgrimages north to wonder at the land, our days but a dragon fly's life, there will again be discoveries so that those who look back at land, time and creation can marvel at the unfathomable.



Scourie Bay

Under 18's Poetry 2nd prize

Spey Bay through the Seasons

Adela Margallo

Where in Summer
Otters dive deep into the river's rich clear waters
For fish
And seals sunbathe on
The sea's rocky shore.

Where in Autumn
Gold and bronze leaves
Cover the forest floor like a carpet of sunbeams
And creatures hide in their
Hidy-holes preparing for the long months ahead.

Where in Winter
Silver frost patterns cover the floor
And fairies dance at midnight
Under the starry night sky

Where in Spring
Everything awakens from its winter sleep
And blooms to life,
And dolphins leap over
Silvery-tipped waves in the moonlight.

Spey Bay is where I like to be best.
So ,every once in a while, I put on my boots and jacket
And walk with my family
While I watch my sister take photos of everything in her path,
My dad tries to give my mum a fright,
My puppy jumps headfirst into the river,
And my mum calling frantically for my puppy to come back.



Sunset at Spey Bay cc-by-sa/2.0 - © valenta



Spey Bay cc-by-sa/2.0 - © ronnie leask

Winner fiction

Cinder Toffee

Vee Walker

'Well, he is not going to be happy with us, John.' The speaker, a broad-faced, tweed-clad and generously-rumped male, did not sound altogether sorry.

The wall clock in the echoing stone hall chimed the hour. The two geologists sat awkwardly on a pair of wooden chairs rather too small for their bulk. Both had removed their deerstalkers, kneading them between hardened palms tattooed with grit from a lifetime's work. Their draft report, all 800-odd pages of it, and the precious box of samples, took up a third spindly chair between them. Although neither realised the other was imitating his own actions, each would in turn lay a hand on the reassuring substance of their findings.

Several months before, Professor Archibald Geikie, no less, had requested their presence, there at his office at the British Geological Society (Edinburgh Branch). He had peered at them over gold-rimmed spectacles, his fingertips drumming on the gold-embossed leather of his rosewood desk. He had then proceeded to fulminate against any upstarts who dared question the clear and the logical and indeed, the natural order of things geological.

'Geology is formed of layers, gentlemen!' he had spat. 'Immense layers which form over the course of æons, but which, logic dictates, must follow the chronological settlement of all creation. What is geology save one sedimentary layer formed on top of another since the time of the Flood, as Murchison has pointed out?'

The younger of the two listeners unwisely cleared his throat to interject. 'But... Lapworth?'

'Lapworth! Pah! Oddities abound in nature. Only the gullible seek to use them as evidence for heresy. Young Lapworth is merely spouting his false idol, Nicol. Utter bunkum!' John had found himself nodding like a puppet. This was more down to the sheer force of The Great Man's presence than true assent.

Ben instead chose to hold his tongue and pretend to be taking notes. John could see he was instead sketching a fair caricature of Professor Geikie seated atop an erupting volcano.

'You do not share The Great Man's views then, Ben?' John asked him, as they traipsed with considerable relief down the staircase towards the damp, grey Edinburgh air.

Ben had shrugged. 'Not that long ago, all Darwin's theorising about fish growing paws and clawing their way out of the mud was considered the ravings of a lunatic, remember?'

John nodded, thoughtfully. Things were changing fast. Geological theories were being embraced which would have been unthinkable only a year or two earlier. 'You heard what Geikie asked of us, though?'

'A Great Man he may be, but his pompous manner will be his undoing,' muttered Ben. Once out on the Caithness flag pavement, he grinned at John from under his umbrella. 'If I have learned one thing from my life in science thus far, it is that utter certainty of any scientific fact can be a dangerous thing,' was all he chose to add.

John understood the unspoken criticism. For upstairs, Professor Archibald Geikie, puce with professional ire, had all but ordered the two geologists to go and prove he and his mentor Roderick Murchison to be in the right.

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Six months had passed since that last encounter with The Great Man. He had penned several increasingly terse letters enquiring as to their progress, the last of which reminded them who was funding their expedition, which they had felt it best to ignore.

They sat in silence, listening uncomfortably to the faintly audible upbraiding of some poor soul in Geikie's office. Eventually John shook his head and snorted, 'Oh, to be on the road up from Ullapool instead, eh Ben?' His companion nodded. Neither was in his natural habitat, there in that heartless and heatless vestibule. They belonged among rough heather and steep hillsides with only each other, and an occasional golden eagle, for companionship.

'D'ye recall that day?' Ben continued. 'We'd paused to catch our breath. Munching our meat-paste sandwiches without much enthusiasm.'

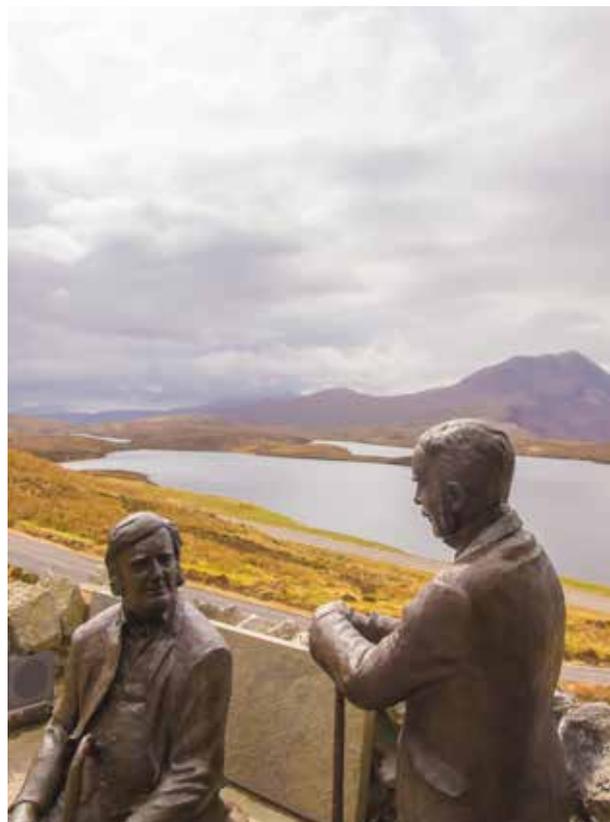
'Lord, yes! The ones made by our landlady in Cròic a Chnocain.'

'That drab little croft overlooking the burial ground.'

'We slept on heather mattresses.'

'Itchy!'

'Very.'



*Knockan Crag Memorial to Ben Peach and John Horne with Lochan an Ais and Cul Beag in view  
cc-by-sa/2.0 - © GP Hemy*

'Those sandwiches. Just awful,' reflected John, shifting his own not inconsiderable weight from one buttock to the other, making the chair beneath him groan. 'The same every blessed day.'

'The only lodgings to be had near to the Crag, though.'

'A kindly enough old thing.'

'No English, only the Gaelic.'

'Fìor fhìor! No packed lunch on the Sabbath, remember?'

'Ah, but that extraordinary sweet stuff she made...'

'Wrapped in brown paper.'

'Quite delicious, wasn't it? Made up for everything else.'

'Indeed.'

Transported back there by their shared memory, the two men could once more feel the clean air and rain on their faces and hear the rattle of a ptarmigan from high on the slopes above the unassuming crag. Lochan an Ais lay spread below them, its grey, rain-pitted surface broken only by a lone great northern diver, its plumage sleek and oily in the downpour. Cul Mor soared beyond, her face veiled in heavy mist.

'A bitty dreich, as they say hereabouts.' John's canvas specimen bags were already grown dark and heavy with rain.

'Indeed. But see how the wet brings out the fine patterns in the rocks.' The younger man glanced at the speaker with considerable affection. How many times had he heard Ben bring out this phrase as mitigation for the most atrocious West Highland weather? Even though they did not always see eye to eye – far from it in fact – he knew the debt he owed his old friend. He, John, had the technical skills: could sketch accurately, write plentiful notes and find a perfect turn of phrase to describe a specimen; but it was Ben who had the eye. It showed in his paintings of the hills.

That morning the crag had shimmered in the bright light caught between two storms, every available rock surface wet. As he stared upwards, Ben's head had inclined slightly to one side in a thoughtful manner which John had come both to anticipate and, occasionally, dread. 'Up yonder today, I reckon. Perhaps we may reach the base of the cliff before we drown, laddie, eh?' John was no longer a laddie by two decades or more. Ben had been teasing him about his comparative youth for as long as he could recall: sometimes he rose to the bait; today, he chose not to.

They worked methodically as usual, measuring, pacing, at times with the whole drenched hillside between them; at others, hunched head-to-head over a specimen, magnifying glass in hand. They spoke only in geological labels at such times:

'Pipe rock. Perfectly clear, look there, and more here.'

'Yes. Durness limestone too.'

'Fucoid beds, Salterella Grits. Only what one might expect, dash it.'

'Yes, yes, the correct sequence. And yet...'. John searched for words which would capture the nature of these oddly compressed sediments.

They had spent months now working slowly around several other crumbling cliffs in the area. In fair weather and foul, they were up and out just after dawn, providing a generous food source for midges and the occasional tick, nourished daily by hip flasks of whisky, dubious sandwiches and sublime confectionery. Sometimes, of course, they would quarrel over their findings. At such moments Ben would stamp off up to a high place to paint, while John would find a cleft out of the wind and tuck himself into it to read. John's copy of *The Old Red Sandstone* was now weather-beaten and grubby. Hugh Miller's ability to express joy in both nature and science always lifted John's spirits, even though he was saddened by how the author's fervent religious beliefs had formed an insurmountable obstacle to his thinking on evolution. Miller's tragic early demise had robbed them all of a powerful and expressive mind.

When Ben and John came together once more, they would never speak of their argument; merely picking up where they had left off. In pencil, in dozens of notebooks, the two men meticulously recorded their still-inconclusive findings. What they had found was a curious mix. Perhaps it was due to glaciation, this odd jumble of layers, they had thought at first. Freezing and thawing can crack and shatter rock. And yet each of them knew in the depths of his soul that the answer did not lie in a glacial event of mere thousands of years ago.

They had paused that day to eat their dismal 'pieces', rendered even less palatable by the steady rainfall. 'John, I must be getting old,' sighed Ben. 'I can feel the damp gnawing at my bones.' For a fleeting moment John wondered if Ben were suggesting they call a halt, which would be a rarity. No such thing. 'I need to warm up,' Ben declared, tossing aside his stale crusts. 'Let us ascend fast to the foot of the crag instead.' With that he was up and off, leaving John to pack up the morning's specimens and plod up the zig-zagging cragside deer track ten minutes or so later.

Ben's cry rent the still air. 'Here! John, hurry! This is it!'

John had no need to ask what it meant. It was their Holy Grail, the conclusive proof – or disproof – they had been instructed to seek.

John dropped the bags to scramble recklessly straight up, the flaky scree slipping beneath his feet. Ben was on his knees at the foot of the crag, as though at prayer. 'At last, John. See there. And there? Clearly Pre-Cambrian, yes? Schists, great sparkling layers of them. And all so altered.'

John joined him in worship at the shrine, impervious to the wet soaking through his plus fours. He touched the pale gold outcrop with disbelieving fingertips. 'Good heavens. This must be vastly more ancient than the Cambrian layers we recorded below!'

'Indeed. Something has thrust the very burning bowels of the earth upwards here, to raise them to the surface. Ye Gods, what mighty force can have brought this about?' demanded Ben. He was pale now, shaking. John rummaged in his pocket and drew out the small and soggy brown paper packet. 'It's quite a shock, Ben,' he said. 'Eat some.'

Instead Ben held a piece of cinder toffee up against the hot-yellow, cold-bubbled rock before them. 'John,' he said unsteadily. 'How does she make this stuff?'

Puzzled, John replied, 'Well. In a great iron pot. Brown sugar. Then...' Light dawned. 'Then, she must superheat it. Mixes in something else to change its nature?'

Ben nodded. 'Yes. Bicarbonate of soda, probably. The mixture would surge upwards as a scalding, foaming mass, quite altered.'

Then she must pull it from the fire and tip it out on to a tin tray to cool.'

'And when it is hard?' asked Ben softly.

'She asks to borrow a hammer.' They said the words together, laughing.

'Bang! Bang! Bang! Elemental powers. Pressure, heat. We have been seeing the rocks as too fixed, John.'

'Exactly. Given sufficient force they can be changed, turned topsy-turvy. This proves it!' said John, already pulling out his notebook. Then he paused. 'Oh. The Professor. And Lapworth.'

'Yes,' said Ben. 'Quite. But we must tell neither. Not yet.'

Thrilled, almost fearful, they fell on the rain-sticky toffee with the appetites of men half starved. ~

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'Get out, you shambolic fool! Out!' A junior geologist fled the Great Man's office without acknowledging their seated presence. After a short interval a pale and tearful young clerk beckoned them inside. John smilingly refused her offer of help. He cradled their report to his chest as Ben hefted the box, its small yet irrefutable samples from Knockan Crag cushioned within.

'Ah, good-day to you both, gentlemen,' boomed Professor Geikie. He did not rise, nor offer any apology for having kept them waiting. 'So?'

It was then that Ben Peach caught the widened eye of John Horne and, albeit fleetingly, winked.

Vee Walker is an author and heritage consultant who lives and works on the Black Isle. She says: "Geology was an early love, inherited from my mother. I tend to look for the human being behind any scientific discovery to help me understand his, or her, achievement."

HUGH MILLER JUNIOR'S MEMOIR - Second version

AN OBSESSIVE OBSERVER AND A POWERFUL IMAGINATION

Introduction by the Editor

A son's opinion of his father is often of great psychological interest, but Hugh Jnr's biographical memoir is fairly objective, more like an obituary. He wrote a very similar, shortened entry for the Dictionary of National Biography published in 1894.

The assessment has several points of interest on the Witness Editor's politics. He identifies Miller as a "man of peace," while a fierce Puritan who nevertheless favoured nonsectarian education. He was a Scot who would "gladly have seen more self-government," at a time when the country was frequently relabelled North Britain. His journalism is strikingly described as "newspaper-teaching." Interesting also is the observation that Hugh Miller had no difficulty reconciling his Puritanism with his love of science and the works of Rabbie Burns.

The tale of how Miller scholar Mike Taylor came upon a second version is if anything more remarkable than the uncovering of the first. He had already published in Archives of Natural History a paper on the first one, found by a descendant lodged in family MSs, when he unexpectedly got an email from a colleague, Dr Sara Stevenson, retired curator of photography at the Scottish National Portrait Gallery.

Sara told him she had been on a research visit abroad when a librarian showed her a remarkable and rare book, dated 1928. This was an album containing calotype portrait photographs by Hill and Adamson, printed in the 1880s from their negatives and bound up with short text memoirs of the sitters. Sara thought she recognised some lines from the text which she had read in Mike's earlier paper, and the initials HM at the end confirmed it was indeed written by the son! Fewer than 40 copies of the album were made, but fortunately one is now in the library of the Scottish National Portrait Gallery.

The album's compiler was Andrew Elliot, once an apprentice to Miller's publisher Johnstone & Hunter. He never quite finished the job, but his son pulled it together and sent it off to various libraries in 1928. Again, like the much shorter first version, it might never have surfaced, but for Sara Stevenson's alertness. It gave Mike Taylor a lot more work to research and annotate its references, and in due course write a second paper for the Archives of Natural History. Both papers are available on line, as is the entry in the Dictionary of National Biography.

We have deleted passages which cover the same ground as other biographies familiar to our readers, and considerably abridged the material covering historic religious controversy and superannuated science as being of relatively less interest today.

MY FATHER HUGH MILLER

He became a keen and incessant observer, a collector of shells and stones; and his native Cromarty, with its wide bay, its cave-hollowed rocks, its natural history without, and its quaint human history within, was a fit nursery for his genius. In the village school he was incorrigibly truant and careless.... He had in truth become a wild, intractable lad....

As an apprentice stonemason, he settled into mental sobriety and an absolute purity of life that was spotless from first to last. His mind had taken a scientific cast even

before he knew it. His first science, in fact, had been child-science.

While Miller pursued his mason's craft, he was always ceaselessly cultivating his powers, – observing, studying, reflecting, and writing, – and amassing within a faultless memory stores of knowledge of books and men, of contemporary history, and of the strata of society. Few men have so thoroughly developed their own brain-power.

Meanwhile his strengthening moral nature slowly gravitated towards Christianity, which, at twenty-five, after some years of examination and thought, became the great determining principle in his life.

We have here edited down the descriptions of his father's gradual entry into the world of letters, employment as an bank accountant and marriage to Lydia Falconer Fraser, "after an almost idyllic courtship," his first published book of folklore, and his amassing of material for The Old Red Sandstone.

There follows an extended passage on Miller's engagement in the crusade against the power of patrons (mainly landowners) in the Church of Scotland, beginning in earnest with his open Letter to Lord Brougham a "noble, effective, and unanswerable composition."

He accepted the post as editor of the *Witness* newspaper with a strange diffidence in his own powers. Once at the editorial desk, however, he found himself – at least for the time – in his right place. There was not at first even a reporter to be had for the paper. With but one ally, Hugh Miller had to stand against the whole newspaper press of the kingdom. But the *Witness* soon became identified with one voice and one man, and Hugh Miller's writings worked in Scotland as a living power, and he now stands, beside Chalmers, as one of the historical figures of the Scottish Disruption.



Thomas Chalmers



D O Hill



Hugh Miller posing as mason

The author remarks of *The Disruption*, a secession of clergy would have been but a protest: this disruption of both ministers and people was little less than a revolution. It was said by a judge to have been the “greatest event in Scotland since 1745, if not since the Union.” In the Free Church Miller beheld the materials, and a unique opportunity, for the realisation of his ideal national church. The church of the future, he insisted, must be missionary not political. It was with great sorrow that he saw his church, “abandoning the vantage ground of her high and unique claim, and ranging herself on the common dissenting level.”

In 1840, chapters on *The Old Red Sandstone, or New Walks in an Old Field* appeared serially in the *Witness*, and were republished in 1841, with remarkable figures of “Old Red” fishes from his own pencil. By this work geologists were delighted and astonished. Their dry science was laboriously making its way, but none too quickly; they gladly hailed this new worker and brilliant illustrator, and at once accorded to the Old Red Sandstone as a formation an importance scarcely before recognised. His technical ichthyology was based on Agassiz’s contemporary researches among the fishes of the “Old Red,” but it contained important improvements... The best part of the work was founded entirely on original observation. “The more I study the fishes of the ‘Old Red,’” wrote Professor Huxley twenty years afterwards, “the more I am struck with the patience and sagacity manifested in Hugh Miller’s researches, and by the natural insight which in his case seems to have supplied the place of special anatomical knowledge.” Common sense, insight, and sheer love of labour gave him a grasp of the scientific method in palaeontology; his powerful imagination, again,

delighted in pictorial restorations of ancient physical geographies, and he thus instinctively realised, so far as in his time was possible, the chief end of geology. His power of scientific illustration probably remains unrivalled.... For vividness, picturesqueness, and above all, in lucid and glowing illustration, nicely adjusted both to the thing illustrated and the thing illustrating, he seems to stand alone.”

The author narrates his publication in 1847, of *Footprints of the Creator, or the Asterolepis of Stromness*, as a reply to the anonymous work espousing a form of evolution, *Vestiges of Creation*. Miller upheld the miracle of creation versus the law of development. Many of the fossils described in this volume he owed to the labours of his devoted friend Robert Dick of Thurso. “Recent science discards much that he founded upon,” says the son, who goes on to



The Grassmarket

detail the inaccuracies.

In 1852 Miller published his autobiography, *My Schools and Schoolmasters*, a work that bids fair to retain perennial freshness in English literature. His next volume received its final corrections on the last day of his life. The *Testimony of the Rocks*, like his controversial work the *Footprints*, mainly deals with the borderland between science and religion. He took the six days of creation as synonymous with six periods, and sublimed them into representative visions of the progress of creation. Except for his idea, indeed, that the seventh day is the Sabbath of Redemption.

The *Testimony of the Rocks* has exerted an influence that latterly seems to have become curiously dissociated from any necessary acceptance of its views. It sustained, in Scotland at least, the calm confidence inspired by Chalmers, that geology and Scripture are not in conflict. The atmosphere to this day has remained comparatively clear; science, religion, and the progress of both, have benefited thereby. "Rightly understood," says Miller, speaking of Genesis, "I know not a single truth that militates against the minutest or least prominent of its details." The declaration has had its weight.

All Hugh Miller's works, except the *Footprints* and the *Testimony*, were first given to the readers of the *Witness* in its columns. They represent only a fraction of his work. His leading articles were elaborated with the same unstinted expenditure of thought, workmanship, and ornament as his books. He retained his old mason habit of leaving every piece of building as good as he could make it. Many of his "leaders" attained a longevity very unusual with productions of their class; some of them went into pamphlets at the time, some others were republished after his death. Five years after it started, the *Witness* became the joint property of himself and his business partner, Robert Fairly.



Disruption - forming the Free Kirk

On vital questions, both public and internal, its sentiments diverged from the guiding majorities of the Free Church. In politics Miller called himself an “old Whig,” – he was in reality an Independent Liberal – “Whig in principle, Tory in feeling,” as he had long before described himself. He held aloof both from “Edinburgh Review Whigs” and “Blackwood Magazine Tories,” not deeming it the duty of private persons to swell political parties, and holding especially, that right and wrong are words of much more emphatic meaning than Whig and Tory. His aim was to inform men’s minds, not to influence their votes. But his influence was too strong not to be worth securing.... More and more as time went on, Hugh Miller, in the words of the Scotsman, “gave dignity and character to the newspaper press of Scotland.” And it was a wholesome thing for the Scotland of his time that on public questions of principle one of the strongest of Scottish heads was so scrupulously pondering and so independently judging. What might be termed his newspaper-teaching was marked by individuality and clear-sightedness.... For the better-being of Scotland he would have gladly seen more self-government. It would have prevented the Disruption, he said, and many a ruinous delay besides. In education he held with the national, not the sectarian, and favoured no narrow restriction of subjects; and in *Thoughts on the Education Question* (1850) outlined a scheme now substantially law.

Better than his contemporaries he knew the power of the masses; he had an almost excessive fear that the gap between lower and upper classes might be so widened that the one class should rush in upon the other with the violence of revolution. He therefore advocated, besides education, a moderate extension of the franchise, the abolition of entail, and the curtailment of the game laws, which he emphatically termed the “crimemaking” laws. He exposed and denounced the Sutherlandshire clearings, and the subsequent intolerant refusal of sites to the Free Church, but he countenanced no vision of clearing the proprietors. His quite realisable ideal, for Highlands and Lowlands alike, was a numerous peasantry, facilities for peasant-proprietorship, and a regulated emigration. He long foresaw the repeal of the Corn



Scott Monument 1845



Stonemasons working on the Scott Monument



The Last of the Clan

Laws to be inevitable; the tenant's true policy, he urged, was to move, not for protection, but for good terms from landlords and compensation for improvements. Of the evils of the bothy system and the defects of labourer's houses he spoke from an experience of which every item lay preserved in his memory. To Chartism he was hostile, but more to its method than its claim. Strikes he discouraged. He accepted a poor-law for Scotland with sorrow as necessary, – thanks to the inefficiency of the old church-administration of relief.

The "stalk of carle-hemp" (toughness) in Hugh Miller was undoubtedly his Puritanism, though he found no difficulty in reconciling his own love of Puritanism, of science, and of Burns. Subjects such as Puseyism, Maynooth, and Sunday railway-traffic, seemed always to lay it bare. In Puseyism he saw only an "inclined slide" into Popery; in Episcopacy, the creeping on to Scottish soil of a tide that would cover her dearest landmarks. He held that Protestantism is inwoven with the constitution, and that in all countries Popery is adverse to order and progress. His remedy for Ireland was to educate and Protestantise, and the grant to Maynooth he would gladly have seen converted into a grant to science.



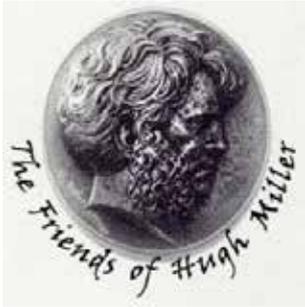
Shrub Mount

In public questions he sometimes bore a part that engendered heat and even flame. A man of peace, he had yet formidable elements as a man of war. He was laboriously fair to the arguments of an antagonist; little regardful of mere personalities; he corrected a few mistakes or misrepresentations calmly enough; but anything having the semblance of persistent indignity to truth aroused his wrath; extreme diffidence was exchanged for exultation in the fight; and he was apt to strike too hard and fight too long. Tenacity was one of his supreme qualities, but it was the cause also of almost his only mistakes. Tenacity in controversy made him the too-rugged combatant he sometimes was; tenacity to his class, added to an extreme modesty, kept him from the friendship of such men as Jeffrey, Cockburn, and Argyll; tenacity to his post made him hold by his Free Church editorship when his best work for his church was done; and tenacity in labour brought him to his too early death. For he was, as Dr John Brown has said of him, an "inexorable taskmaster" of his own energies. No power seemed sufficient to take him from work till it was done. As early as 1846, when he was writing his *First Impressions of England*, his friend Makgill Crichton went in distress from friend to friend, saying "Miller is killing himself, working always up yonder. Can no one get him out?" It was the nature of the man. Youth and strength, when he had them, grew haggard and lax at such times. The seeds of the "stone-mason's disease" had been sown in his constitution long before, and a frame weakened by repeated attacks of inflammation of the lungs, was no fit tenement for his intense mind to work in. One of the chapters in his last volume was written in the very height of one of these recurring fevers. Day after day the servants heard him rising from his night-long labours only when they were beginning their morning work. He retained the leverage and poise of his intellect, but its fulcrum was wearing through; and on the night of the 23rd December 1856 it suddenly gave way, and he died by his own hand.

"There is no likeness of Hugh Miller," said an eminent geologist to us recently, "that adequately conveys the immense strength and mass of his face." Perhaps the early Calotype of D. O. Hill's, though not very distinct in its lineaments, and certainly too aggressive in its expression, is more suggestive of strength than any other likeness that exists. But there was much in his face besides. He had a large, calm, grey eye, which could wax very brilliant; his smile lit up the ruggedness of his features; his voice was surprisingly soft. Quiet in society, loving much to be alone, and counting himself a working man to the end there was a certain stateliness in his bearing to which even the word grandeur has been applied. Burns must have deemed "the pride of worth" not only pardonable but honourable; Hugh Miller would not have denied that he possessed it.

H. M.





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