SIR ROBERT AYTOUN
1570–1638

Scots by birth, Aytoun wrote a great deal of poetry in Latin, Greek, and French as well as English, but published little of it, and never laid formal claim to the title of a poet. When one of his descendants published the entire body of his writings, in 1844, it became clear that there were very good reasons for his modesty—except for this one poised and dignified poem, nothing else that he wrote has a trace of distinction. But this is an eloquent valediction.

To an Inconstant One

I loved thee once; I'll love no more—
Thine be the grief as is the blame;
Thou art not what thou wast before,
What reason I should be the same?

He that can love unloved again,
Hath better store of love than brain:
God send me love my debts to pay,
While unthriffs fool their love away!

Nothing could have my love o'erthrown
If thou hadst still continued mine:
Yea, if thou hadst remained thine own,
I might perchance have yet been thine.

But thou thy freedom didst recall
That it thou might elsewhere enthral:
And then how could I but disdain
A captive's captive to remain?

When new desires had conquered thee
And changed the object of thy will,
It had been lethargy in me,
Not constancy, to love thee still.

Yea, it had been a sin to go
And prostitute affection so:
Since we are taught no prayers to say
To such as must to others pray.

Yet do thou glory in thy choice,
Thy choice of his good fortune boast;
I'll neither grieve nor yet rejoice
To see him gain what I have lost.

The height of my disdain shall be
To laugh at him, to blush for thee;
To love thee still, but go no more
A-begging at a beggar's door.