



"AULD DUBRACH."


(From a Painting by Andrew Jervise, after the original by Colvin Smith.)

“AULD DUBRACH,”

WHO WAS OUT WITH PRINCE CHARLIE IN THE '45,
AND LIVED TO THE GREAT AGE OF 110 YEARS.

“Age sits with decent grace upon his visage,
And worthily becomes his silver locks.
He wears the marks of many years well spent.”—*Rowe*.

FIRST VERSION.

“ONNIE Prince Charlie.” How the heart warms at the sound of his name! There is a magic and music in the cadence of these three words only known to the mind and soul of a true-blue Scot. Every real son of the heather has a “lee side” to the Stuart family, and more especially to “The Young Chevalier,” the hero of Preston and Falkirk. What a halo of romance hangs over his history. He landed with seven men in the wilds of Moidart, and soon a kingdom rallied round his banner. His foes fell before him as snow melts before the summer sun. He held high revelry as a gay and courtly host at Holyrood. His contempt for, and endurance of fatigue, and eagerness for battle, shone pre-eminent even among Highland chieftains. But, alas! alas! his bright sun set, never to rise again, on the bloody field of Drummosie, otherwise Culloden Muir.

This sketch of the life of one of his followers throws a strong light on the devotion to the Prince personally of the men he led.

An old lady, upwards of ninety years of age, gives the following interesting particulars about “Auld Dubrach Grant” :—
“I remember ‘Dubrach’ residing with Mr. John Chalmers, joiner, Airlie Street, Brechin, for some time during his sittings to Colvin Smith, R.S.A., at his studio in Pearse Street. The result of these sittings is a grand likeness, now hanging on the wall of the staircase of Brechin Castle. I frequently saw the old man while in Brechin, and had a crack with him. It may seem strange that I or any other person still in existence could have seen a man

who had fought at Culloden in the year 1746; but sixty-eight years ago I not only saw him, but talked to him and his sister, or perhaps daughter, in their neat cottage in Lethnot in Angus."

The old Culloden veteran's proper name was Peter Grant, but he was better known by the sobriquet "Auld Dubrach," from having been born on a farm of that name in Braemar in the year 1714. Grant was by trade a tailor, and while yet a youth became a strong Jacobite. So strong was his love for the Stuart dynasty that he, in 1745, threw down the tailor's goose, needles, and shears, and joined the ranks of "bonnie Prince Charlie." All, or nearly all, the hardy sons of the mountains, as is recorded in Alexander Laing's beautiful song, before 1715, again rallied round the young Prince, in 1745, when the standard was planted on the braes o' Mar. Peter Grant was a full private in the Prince's army when it was reviewed on Glasgow Green. Afterwards, for an act of bravery at the battle of Prestonpans, he was promoted to the rank of sergeant.

In the year 1746, in his twenty-second year, Peter Grant was a very powerful fellow. It is recorded of him that in the battle of Culloden he made more than a dozen of Cumberland's men bite the dust. It is to be presumed that, if every man of the Highland host had done as well as "Auld Dubrach" on the field of bloody Culloden, Bonnie Prince Charlie would have been master thereof, and from the dark book of fate a leaf would have been torn. After the defeat and flight of the unfortunate Prince Charlie, Peter Grant and many more were made prisoners, carried to Carlisle, and lodged in jail to await trial. Grant contrived somehow to escape from prison, and to make his way home on foot to Braemar. After the country had settled down, he again quietly resumed handling the needle and goose, having thus been obliged to give up the gun.

Some years after he had again settled in Braemar, Peter Grant married a strong, fine-looking young woman, named Mary Cumming. The fruit of this marriage was a boy and a girl—Peter and Anne. A number of years after his marriage, Peter Grant became tenant of the small farm of Dubrach, the place where he was born, brought up, and named after in his later years.

After many years had passed away, and the lease of his little farm had run out, and he considered too far advanced in years to have the lease renewed, "Auld Dubrach" removed from Braemar to Lethnot, Forfarshire. Here his wife, Mary Cumming, died, and

was buried in the churchyard of that parish in the year 1811, at the age of 63.

A short time before George IV. visited Edinburgh in 1822, two gentlemen, rambling for pleasure among the wilds of Lethnot, happened to meet “Auld Dubrach” not far from his cottage door. Attracted by the remarkable appearance of the old man, they entered into conversation with him. He invited them to enter his little cottage, and at their request he gave them a brief graphic sketch of his eventful history, in which he told them that while he lived he would remain a true Jacobite. The old man eloquent, with the fire of youth again burning in his eye, sprang to his feet and sang:—

“ Wha wadna fecht for Charlie,
Wha wadna draw the sword,
Wha wadna face the foeman
At the royal Prince's word !”

The two gentlemen were so much interested in “Auld Dubrach's” account of his life and deeds, that they resolved to try to do something for him wherewith he could end his days in comfort. They called on the parish minister, and suggested that he should use his influence to relieve old Peter Grant, and that the best time would be when the King was in Edinburgh—which was to be soon. The reverend gentleman thought the idea a good and charitable one, and he believed his request would be granted, as old Peter held the unique position of being the only man living who had fought against the present dynasty. Surely His Majesty would be gracious with him in consideration of his great age (108) and the novelty of the case.

A petition was drawn up, containing an epitome of Grant's history, which, after it was signed by the minister and elders of the parish, and also by Grant himself, was forwarded to the King when he arrived in Edinburgh. About eight days before starting for Edinburgh, the Hon. William Maule, afterwards Lord Panmure, had a suitable dress provided for “Auld Dubrach” in which to appear before the King. However, the inflexible old veteran would not submit to any alteration in his apparel, but would (and did) go with the clothing which he had worn on the battlefield of Culloden—a tartan coat, kilt, brogues with large brass buttons on the uppers, a Glengarry bonnet with an eagle's feather in the front of it, and a pike-staff seven feet long, with a brass knot on the top end ornamented with pretty blue tassels.

Grant arrived at Edinburgh all right, and was as proud as the King himself, if not more so. When Lord Panmure presented him to His Majesty, Grant was desired to uncover his head, but he disdained to do anything of the kind. Lord Panmure, pointing to Grant, thus addressed the King:—"Your Majesty, this man is 108 years of age, and is now the only old enemy your Majesty has still living on the earth. When he was young and thoughtless, he fought against your Majesty's dynasty at Culloden, but he has been a peaceable and loyal subject since then. What will your Majesty be pleased to do with him now?"

The King seemed quite confused at first, if not a little alarmed, at seeing a tall man standing in front of him with a defiant air, his bonnet on his head, and a long pike-staff in his hand. When Lord Panmure explained the matter to His Majesty, the King fixed his eyes on the old Jacobite and said:—"Are you now sorry that you were so very foolish and disloyal in your young days as to enter the service of the Pretender?"

At the question, Grant's eyes flashed fire, and his breast heaved with emotion. He gave vent to his disturbed feelings by exclaiming:—"Pe ma faith, sir, I wad fecht for him yet: an' ye'll ne'er be a man like bonnie Prince Charlie."

As the King did not know the meaning of all the words addressed to him by the old Jacobite, Lord Panmure explained them to him. He laughed and said:—"Take him away; take him away out of my sight; he is still a rebel, I think, and ought to be shot. However, you are at liberty to have him booked for £50 a-year."

The old veteran then took off his bonnet for the first time, and thanked His Majesty in the best manner he could for his great kindness to him.

Peter Grant was fully six feet in height, stout in proportion, and well formed in every limb. His feet and hands were small, and he had a fine-looking open brow, small and dark piercing eyes, with very long hair, which hung in ringlets down his back, and was as white as the beautiful snow on the brow of his native mountains. He always exhibited an air of sturdy independence, befitting a man who had fought for his king and country. On high occasions he wore the dress he had worn at Falkirk, Prestonpans, Culloden, and also when presented to George IV.

Peter Grant did not enjoy his pension long, for he ended his eventful life's journey on 11th February, 1824, and was buried in

the cemetery of Invercauld near the Castletown of Braemar. The following inscription, cut on a large flag of granite, points out his grave :—

“ERECTED TO THE MEMORY
OF
PETER GRANT,
SOMETIME FARMER IN DUBRACH,
WHERE HE WAS BORN IN 1714.

—
DIED AT AUCHENDRYNE, AGED 110.

SECOND VERSION.

PETER GRANT—“Auld Dubrach’s”—family consisted of three sons and three daughters, viz. :—John, Jean (afterwards Mrs. Smith), Peter (a gardener in the north), Annie (who lived with and cared for her father), William, the youngest (a cattle dealer in a small way), and a daughter whose name we do not know. John, the eldest son, with whom his father came from Braemar, was tenant of Westside farm, which is situated on the extreme west border of Lethnot parish. The old man resided in a small cottage beside his son until about the time of his getting the pension from the king’s bounty fund, when Lord Panmure built him a neat cottage (now used as a gamekeeper’s lodge) near the schoolhouse.

While on the moors during the shooting season, in 1821, the Messrs. Smart, corn merchants, Montrose, came on “Auld Dubrach” on his son’s farm of Westside. As they were staying with their sister, Mrs. Leighton, at the farm of Drumcairn, which lay near the manse, the two gentlemen called on the Rev. Mr. Symers next day, when they suggested that something should be done for the old man, in the shape of a provision for such extreme old age. Mr. Symers cordially agreed to the proposal; and as Mr. Wm. Smart (of Cairnbank, near Brechin) happened to possess great influence with Lord Panmure, no time was lost in bringing the matter before his lordship. Lord Panmure at once agreed that, if a petition were got up, he would take charge of it, and see that it was properly presented to His Majesty George IV. In drawing up the petition, Mr. Symers facetiously remarked that, if the petitioners could not recommend to His Majesty’s generosity their fellow-subject as his oldest loyal subject, they might mention him as his oldest living enemy—which remark greatly amused

royalty. Peter Grant—"Auld Dubrach"—never was presented to George IV. The Hon. William Maule, afterwards Lord Panmure, was presented to the King, among many others, on the 20th August, 1822; and with one other exception—that of his having presented a large supply of "Glenlivet" for the use of the royal table—the Lord of Panmure's name is not again mentioned, as it certainly would have been if this presentation of "Auld Dubrach" had taken place—the more so, seeing there is a very complete record of the proceedings of the Court during the time George IV. remained in Scotland. It is also a mistake to state Grant's height as that of a tall man: he was, on the contrary, a little man, well proportioned, of firm build, and every inch a Highlander. His youngest son, William, bore a close resemblance to him, but possessed neither his father's piercing eye, nor his force of character, being a quiet, canny man. A scene somewhat resembling that narrated in the first version occurred on the occasion of making the petition ready for transmission to Brechin Castle. Those actively engaged in getting signatures having met, "Auld Dubrach," of course, being present, when, in the midst of their business, Grant, who was sitting by, startled them by stamping the floor with foot and staff, and, with flashing eye, exclaiming:—"If I were only young again, I would draw my sword for Prince Charlie."

The petition was a very interesting document. After informing His Majesty of his age and so forth, and that he was perhaps his oldest enemy alive, it proceeded thus:—"Educated a Roman Catholic, and in all the prejudices of the times, he drew his sword in behalf of another family, and fought with all the energy of a Highlander; but time and experience have corrected his views. Under the mild administration of your royal predecessors, he has seen the nation flourish, and its glory upheld by their wise, able, and vigorous measures. With equal zeal, then, would he draw the sword in defence of that monarch who now fills the throne, and who, he trusts in God, for the good and happiness of his people, will continue to do so for many years to come." The petition was signed by Patrick Grant, the petitioner; Alex. Symers, minister; James Young, elder; Thomas Mollison, elder; James Gordon, elder; and James Speed, elder—as witnesses.

It was due to Mrs. Symers, the minister's wife, that the pension was secured in succession to "Dubrach's" daughter Ann.

Mrs. Symers's first introduction to "Auld Dubrach" is worth

reading. The news reached his ears that the newly-appointed minister's wife was none other than the daughter of the officer under whom, in his youthful days, he had fought at Culloden. It so happened that a new manse was being erected at the time, the family being temporarily accommodated in the offices—the juvenile portion in the barn, and Mr. and Mrs. Symers in the loft above. “Dubrach's” impatience would brook no delay in order to give his “pairn” a welcome; so, very early one morning, Mrs. Symers was aroused by the bursting open of the door, and in rushed a little man, cracking his thumbs, shouting, and capering in the direction of her bed. Terrified, she called out to her husband:—“Oh, rise and put out that madman.” But on he came, dancing round and round her bed, exclaiming:—“I maun see my pairn; I maun see my pairn.” After he had expended a little more fervour, she got introduced to her new acquaintance, thus forming a loyal friendship for herself and family which lasted throughout his life.

“Dubrach's” officer at Culloden—the father of the late Mrs. Symers, Lethnot—was Mr. Carnegie of Baluakie, near Arbroath. His father was “cut” at the rising in 1715, and was in consequence mulcted to such an extent as to ruin the family patrimony—his eldest son, “Dubrach's” officer, escaping, by being under age and held as irresponsible. His aunt, Miss Robertson of Lude, being a strong Jacobite, promised her nephew, when a lad of nineteen, to procure an officer's commission for him by advancing money to raise a regiment, which thus took him, when a man, to Culloden.

As to “Dubrach's” military equipment mentioned as worn at that presentation to royalty and elsewhere—would this not be the *bona fide* suit provided by Lord Panmure for “Dubrach's” sitting for his portrait? Besides, would it have been rational, or even possible, for an incarcerated rebel to make his escape, as “Dubrach” is said to have done, through an open country, when danger was at its very height, in a garb which would in a moment stamp and convict him to a certainty? Another difficulty arises as to the identity of the said tartan. From 1745 to 1822 is seventy-seven years. Could “Dubrach” then possibly be wearing daily his garb of many battles? We have a precedent in sacred history of garments used for forty years, yet were they not worn: but unless “Dubrach's” tartans had got a touch of the magic wand of Treves, it is difficult to account for their longevity.