

GEORGE HALKET.

PERHAPS the most virulent ballad against the Hanoverian *réjime*, with its concomitant Whiggery and Presbyterianism, which Jacobitism produced, was "Whirry Whigs Awa'", a ballad which had a popularity, or rather notoriety, far beyond its merits, and certainly one which may be read to-day without rousing the same virtuous indignation which it did among zealous Presbyterians shortly before the rising of the '45. For long the authorship of this ballad was locally credited to a William Jack, from the fact that in some copies (says Peter Buchan) there were lines appended which fathered it upon

Will Jack,  
Who had Corskelly boats in tack,  
But who could neither read nor write,  
Tho' wonderfully could indite.

Peter Buchan, however, in 1825, in a note to the song "Logie o' Buchan", in his "Gleanings of Scarce Old Ballads", gives the

authorship of that song and the ballad of "Whirry Whigs" to one George Halket, sometime schoolmaster at Rathen. It afterwards appeared that Buchan had several pieces of Halket's in his possession, and he ultimately gave, in 1834, an exact transcript of "Whirry Whigs" from the copy "first printed on 20th July, 1744, under the immediate eye and superintendence of the author". Subsequent inquiry by Andrew Jervise into the particulars of Buchan's sketch of Halket has resulted in considerable corrections, especially of dates. Halket (who, according to Buchan, was a native of Aberdeenshire) entered on the duties of parochial schoolmaster, precentor, and session-clerk in the parish of Rathen in 1714. He seems to have lived in the same room in which he taught "the young idea how to shoot"; for, in 1718, when he took up the bonds and blessedness of wedlock with Janet Adamson, the heritors, taking into consideration the dilapidated state of the bed, which formed part of the school furniture, resolved, in due form, not to give him a new one, but to repair the old box-bed, and set it up as a partition dividing the school-chamber; at the same time causing a new window to be made to give light to the primitive bed-chamber thus created. Here, in the ben-end of the schoolhouse, with its box-bed partition, the dominie and his family lived till 1725, when circumstances, long forshadowed, closed in upon him and compelled him to seek new quarters. Whether through the ill-fortune which crushed the cause he had at heart, or through the inherent drouth which seems of old to have beset the teaching craft, we cannot say—probably both causes operated—but suspicion is that our dominie took pretty freely to the bottle. Jervise, who examined his registers, speaks of the altered character of his later handwriting, "which", says he, "may have arisen from the irregular habits into which he fell". Now, it is well known that for the most part—

The Jacobite, poor scribbling crew,  
Who wrote for the Pretender,

liked something stronger than "French wine" in order to outvie the alleged virtues of that cheer extolled by their opponents in "the excellent new ballad of *Brunswick Mum*". It may have been the case, that Halket was a right rollicking

blade, full of song, full of satire—just the kind of companion to keep the table in a roar, whether that table was at the village ale-house or elsewhere; but we cannot believe that he was a debauchee. Some men are so constituted and circumstanced that they can rarely keep on the narrow path of duty, but tend to become wanderers and backsliders, because of the dash of social vagabondism which nature has infused into their constitution. Halket certainly did become a backslider, and, what in the eyes of kirk-sessional decorum was even worse, he could not be made a penitent one. Things had gone on for some time with occasional bickerings between him and the minister, till at last the session, no longer able to wink at “his faults and gross miscarriages”, brought him to book in September, 1725. From the session record we learn—“That notwithstanding many warnings, he (Halket) had come to that height of impudence as to deny all the faults he stands guilty of, and will not be convinced. or made sensible of his miscarriages, and he having relapsed again and again, and no reformation of heart or of ways to be found in him, it is the judgment of the minister and session of Rathen that the said George Halket be laid aside from officiating as schoolmaster or precentor”.

Alas! poor Halket! The home, sliced off the schoolhouse by moving the box-bed, and lighted up by a glass window at the cost of £7 10s. Scots, was soon to be handed over to “the sober and discreet youth” whom the session had appointed to succeed him; and now, with wife and three children, bag and baggage, he takes the high road to Cairnbulg, where he is said to have soon had a full school. It is supposed that it was while there that he wrote the ballad of “Whirry Whigs”. Perhaps it was: certainly he produced one thing while there which Buchan did not know of, and which is of importance as an item of local bibliography. We refer to a small volume of poetry written by him, and printed in 1737. The contents of this *extremely rare* production (the only copy which we know being the Jervise one, now in the Mitchell Library, Glasgow) helps us more fully to get at, and better to understand, the singular character of the erring Jacobite dominie, and modifies considerably the view one might otherwise take of him from the kirk-session minute, and the inference drawn by Jervise from the altered

character of his handwriting, noted above. For, though we find the spirit of warm partisanship peeping out very unmistakably in some of his most serious pieces, yet there is present in the whole performance the character of a man morally intact; and who, though shipwrecked at Rathen, possessed, under all his delinquencies and backslidings, a full sense of the responsibilities which life had laid upon him. The booklet above referred to is a small 12mo. of 24 pages, and bears the following title:—“OCCASIONAL POEMS upon Several Subjects, viz.—1. Advice to youth. 2. Good Friday. 3. Easterday. 4. A pastoral. By George Halket. Aberdeen: Printed for the Author, 1737”. The rarity of the volume as an item of local poetry would in itself justify the brief allusion to its contents we now make, let alone the fact that it comes from the same pen as that which is reputed to have given us “Logie o’ Buchan” and “Whirry Whigs Awa’”. In a poetical dedication to “the honourable Alexander, Master of Saltoun”, a young man in his 27th year, who, on the death of his father in 1748, became thirteenth Lord Saltoun, he says:—

To you bright Youth, of noble birth descent,  
 An ancient fam’ly born to represent;  
 In number of our Scottish peers of worth,  
 Ev’n Saltoun House, and Frasers of Philorth.  
 To you intirely with profound Respect,  
 In Hopes Your Honour will not me reject;  
 But take me under shadow of Your wing,  
 Where sheltered I may safely sit and sing.  
 The following Poems and the Pastoral  
 I dedicate most humbly, and withal,  
 I pray the Lord preserve You on this stage  
 From dangers of the present corrupt age!  
 That you may prove a blessing to our nations,  
 Your parents Comfort, Joy of your Relations.  
 In this and t’other world may you possess  
 All in-ex-here, and there e-ternal Happiness.

In a short preface he declares his “design in publishing this little book” to be the good of his readers, and “not . . . a desire of applause or curiosity of being called an author”.

The “Advice to Youth” contains 122 lines, and is based on the text from Eccles. xii. 1, 2. The following will show his manner:—

Remember, man, thy Maker, in thy youth.  
 Death spares no age, nor can thy tender growth  
 Procure one hour's reprieve, one moment small,  
 The summons given, thou must obey the call.  
 Most certain of all truths that all must die,  
 For all have sinned, yet much uncertainty  
 Lies in the time, place, manner of our ends,  
 And on our short time here, our weel or woe depends.

\* \* \* \* \*

Delay not then, the danger's great, young man,  
 Thy breath's a blast, thy life's a flow'r, a span.  
 Suppose thou might live long from sickness free,  
 Yet who can tell if old age thou shalt see.  
 Death's dormitories view, where graves are throng,  
 More there ye'll see of three than six foot long.  
 Watch then and pray, as in God's sight behave,  
 Nor labour is, nor working in the grave.

“ Good Friday ”, a poem of 261 lines, contains some bitter party allusions against the “ Scottish and English Whigs ”. It opens thus :—

Not great Apollo, nor the Muses nine  
 Do I invoke, such deities I decline,  
 While I through grace and strength of him above,  
 The funeral song sing of eternal love.

After calling on men to put on deepest mourning, and on earth, moon, stars, sun, &c., &c., to show their amazement, he describes the agonies of Christ in the garden, his betrayal, &c., and goes on :—

Of's disciples one we see  
 Through fear denied him, all forsake and flee,  
 Whilst malefactor-like he's rudely used  
 Dragg'd by th' insulting multitude, abused,  
 Arraign'd before their Sanhedrim, accus'd  
 By witness false suborn'd, blasphemers nam'd  
 And innocence by all to death condemn'd.  
 Not half such spite, rage, fury, malice shew'd  
*Brutus* and *Cassius* who their hands embrued  
 In *Cæsar's* blood; nor when that rebel race  
 Of S——s and E——h W——s denude of grace  
 Though under colour of religion, shed  
 The blood of Charles the First, their sovereign, led  
 By those train'd bands of hell 'gainst him conspir'd  
 To public scaffold, where the much desir'd  
 Beloved, admir'd King, Royal martyr fell,  
 A victim slain by these bloodhounds of hell.

Then follows a graphic and picturesque description of the crucifixion.

“Easter-day, a Poem on the Resurrection of our Blessed Lord and Saviour” (containing 148 lines) details the events of the rising and ascension of Christ much in the style of the previous poem, but does not rise to nearly the same level, and has not a word of Jacobitism in it.

“Sandy, a pastoral written in imitation of Virgil, Eclogue v. To the memory of the Rev. worthy and eminently pious Mr. Alexander Moor, sometime minister of the Gospel at Fraserburgh, who died Ap. 20, 1717” (contains 181 lines). From Scott’s “Fasti” we learn that this Alexander Moore was son to the Rev. James Moore, who was translated from Rathen to Fraserburgh sometime about 1667, and who was gifted by the king in the estate of Alexander Crawford, in Rathen, 1678. His son Alexander took his degree of M.A. at King’s College, in 1681, and became helper to his father. On his father’s death, he was intruded on the parish, 1703. Bishop Keith says he was “the best of men I ever saw”.

The pastoral, which is rather stilted and absurd, has for interlocutors *Geordie* and *Willie*, and opens:—

GEO.—Come, Willie, since we’re met, and have both skill,  
 Thou charming flute to manage, I the quill;  
 Let us sit down within this shady grove,  
 And play, and write, and sing of what we love.

W.—Age should be honour’d, you shall have the place,  
 See how the gowans, pink, and primrose grace  
 The pleasant grove; the leaves a murmuring make,  
 And with cool zephir’s breezes gently shake!

\* \* \* \* \*

The one praises the musical and story-telling powers of the other, and of a third shepherd, *Ritchie*, and, after an interchange of compliments, and a long panegyric on *Sandy* by *Willie*, *Geordie* breaks out:—

Such is thy song to me, thou divine bard,  
 As rest to weary limbs, or well-cur’d lard  
 To English palates, or the rubbing-stock  
 To the bull’s neck, when folded is the flock:  
 Nor could the Hybla honey please my taste,  
 So much, as now mine ears thou ravish’t hast.

Amen! Amen! our readers will say, in so far as the ravishing process is concerned, in this magnificent specimen of "the art of sinking in poetry". *Geordie* then goes on to tell how he saw

. . . the shepherd, Sandy, mount the sky,  
And through the milky way ascend on high.

His entrance into heaven is most extravagant, but to *Willie*, *Geordie's*

. . . voice is sweeter far to me,  
Than mavis, thrush, or nightingale could be.

They make mutual presents of a lamb and a whelp, and part with much concern for one another's future welfare.

Halket remained at Cairnbulg for twenty-five years, when, in 1750, he removed to Memsie, and undertook the tutorship of the families of Colonel Fraser and Sir James Innes, doing other teaching work as well. He received from his patrons six bolls meal and three bolls malt as part payment for his services, an arrangement which, as far as they were concerned, gave little chance of "the maut getting aboon the meal", as was wont with the dominie. He latterly removed to Tyrie, where he died in 1756, and is said by Buchan to have been buried within the old churchyard of Fraserburgh. The verses from the ballad which we now give is from Buchan's text, but we cannot help expressing a conviction we have—that the hand of the editor has helped here and there to give it, at least, the air of completeness which it now wears. It is a notable production, however, as it presents a *résumé* of the history of Jacobitism from their own point of view, full of strong party spirit—and is besides a different and fuller version than that given in any of the Jacobite collections. Hogg's version, which is the same as that given by Mackay and Malcolm in their collections, is shorter and altogether more Scotch than Buchan's. Hogg says of it—"Of this confused ballad I am sure I got more than *twenty* copies, and the greater part of them quite different from one another. On comparing one I got from Mr. Wallace, Peterhead, with another sent me by Mr. Gordon, both equally long, I found not one single verse the same. I made up the present copy out of several, leaving out a number of stanzas of extraneous matter. The ballad has

visibly been composed at different times and by different hands". We must, however, take Peter Buchan at his word. He declares that he prints it *exactly* as it stands in the original copy; and it is something in his favour to find that the same kind of stilted versification, found here and there in the ballad, is also to be found in Halket's verses, as exhibited above. The whole ballad contains 38 verses, but the following samples will show its manner sufficiently well:—

## WHIRRY WHIGS AWA', MAN.

Where are the days that we have seen,  
 When *Phæbus* shone fu' bright, man,  
 Days when fu' merry we have been,  
 When every one had right, man;  
 Now gloomy clouds do overshadow,  
 And spread wide over a', man,  
 Ill boding comets blaze o'erhead,  
*O whirry whigs awa', man.*

Now ill appears with face fu' bare,  
 'Mong high and low degree, man,  
 And great confusion every where,  
 Which every day we see, man;  
 A blind man's chosen for a guide,  
 If they get not a fa', man,  
 There's none needs wonder if they slide,  
*O whirry whigs awa', man.*

We are divided as you see,  
 A sad and dreadful thing, man,  
 'Twixt malice, pride, and presbytery,  
 And Satan leads the ring, man;  
 Our nation's under misery,  
 And slavery with a', man,  
 Yet deaf'd with din of liberty,  
*O whirry whigs awa', man.*

Our decent gowns are all put down,  
 Dare scarcely now be seen, man,  
 Geneva frocks take up their room  
 Entitled to the tiends, man;  
 Who cant and speak the most discreet,  
 And say they love the law, man,  
 Yet are a pack of hypocrites,  
*O whirry whigs awa', man.*

\* \* \* \* \*

*Montrose* convey'd the gallant *Graham*,  
 For the royal right arose, man,  
 Against the covenanting lambs,  
 And did the same oppose, man ;

At *Alford*, *Oldearn*, and *Kilsyth*,  
 Their backs did soundly cla', man,  
 The loyal hearts like sheep did drive  
 The rebel Whigs awa', man.  
 With few but royal to his praise,  
 To thousands chase he gave, man,  
 His like was not since *Wallace* days,  
 For conduct, courage, brave, man.

Wherever he heard of rebels horse,  
 On them with speed did fa', man,  
 He thought himself a happy corse,  
 Who could get first awa', man.  
 But *Huntly* with the *Gordons* proud,  
 Deserted him in's need, man,  
 The ruling pow'r cause not allow'd  
 And much mischief did breed, man.

At *Philip Haugh* he was defeat,  
 His men in field did fa', man,  
 Yet made a glorious retreat  
 Till better days he saw, man.  
 The *Assine* laird, that treacherous loon,  
 Beguil'd him by a wile, man,  
 And carried him to *Edinburgh* town,  
 Where quarter'd was *Argyle*, man.

And being tried by lawless crew,  
 Sentenced was to die, man,  
 His head set on the *Nether Bow*,  
 Proclaim'd Whig's loyalty, man.  
 Our prince in peace restor'd again,  
 To these our mourning isles, man,  
*Montrose* head from the port took down,  
 And set up gly'd *Argyle's*, man.

\* \* \* \* \*

An *Orange* next from *Holland* came,  
 That played with parties baith, man,  
 Whigs set him up, he set up them,  
 Did us a world of skaith, man.

When he cam o'er our king to be,  
 His own father-in-law, man,  
 By his *Dutch* guards, he drove to sea,  
 Then swore he ran awa', man.

With Whigs he was so much at one,  
 To them he proved right kind, man,  
 His great-grandfather's martyrdom,  
 Came never in his mind, man.  
 All that loved the royal race,  
 He favoured not at a', man,  
 But stript them both of power and place,  
*O whirry whigs awa', man.*

Our worthy bishops he dang down,  
 Opprest our church and state, man,  
 And set up start-ups of their own,  
 By *Dutchcraft* and deceit, man.  
 The thirteen years that he did reign,  
 We had no peace nor law, man,  
 But Whigs as *Willie* played to sing,  
*O whirry whigs awa', man.*

\* \* \* \* \*

But *Willie's* latter end did come,  
 He broke his collar bone, man,  
 We cho'se a better, royal *Anne*,  
 And set her on the throne, man.  
 And then we had both seed and bread,  
 And plenty over a', man,  
 We had no scarcity of food,  
*O whirry whigs awa', man.*

Now wicked England did invent,  
 To make an unity, man,  
 To which the Whigs did soon consent,  
 When promised presbytery, man.  
 I wish they had been in their graves,  
 Who did the letters draw, man,  
 These whinning knaves have made us slaves,  
*O whirry whigs awa', man.*

\* \* \* \* \*

We then sought out a *German* thing,  
 Call'd to grace the throne, man,  
 Then for the beggars he did bring,  
 Sore taxes were laid on, man;

Even heavy burdens on our malt,  
 And ale, by shift called law, man,  
 On leather, candles, soap and salt,  
*O whirry whigs awa', man.*

\* \* \* \* \*

When *George* the first went God knows where,  
 His son comes now the last, man,  
 And wholly moves the *British* sphere,  
 Sae our best days are past, man.  
 Whose fault it is I cannot tell,  
 Our liberty's awa', man ;  
 Our ancient rights for gold they sell ;  
*O whirry. Whigs awa', man.*

\* \* \* \* \*

If, after reading the extracts given from the "Occasional Poems—1737", one may justly entertain doubts anent the reputed authorship of the above ballad, which certainly must have been written about 1740, how infinitely more doubtful is it, that the same hand could have given us that fine natural song, "Logie o' Buchan"? That it belongs to the same time, and hails from the same locality, there can be no doubt. "The *hero* of the song", writes the Rev. Geo. Cruden, in "The New Statistical Account of Scotland", "was a gardener at Logie, in Crimond, about the middle of last century; the *heroine*, a good-looking little woman, whom I have often seen in my early years, then married to a respectable farmer". He also names Halket as the *reputed* author, but he seems to have been indebted to Buchan for that part of his information. Buchan says that the song was written by Halket in 1736-7, while he was teaching at Rathen and residing in Crimond. We have already seen, from the session records, that Halket taught at Rathen from 1714-25, and resided during that period in the ben-end of the school house,—and that at the date given by Buchan, if he was teaching at all, it was at Cairnbulg,—and there is no evidence of his ever having resided in the parish of Crimond at all. Apart from these discrepancies, however, the high merit of the song makes it almost an impossibility for it to have emanated from the same mind as elaborated the crudities of "Occasional Poems". As an anonymous product of the muse (and we strongly suspect a *feminine* muse) of the time, it deserves a place in our record of local song:—

## LOGIE O' BUCHAN.

O Logie o' Buchan, O Logie the laird,  
 They hae ta'en awa' Jamie that delv'd in the yard,  
 Wha play'd on the pipe an' the viol sae sma,  
 They hae ta'en awa' Jamie the flower o' them a'.

He said, think na lang, lassie, tho' I gang awa,  
 He said, think na lang, lassie, tho' I gang awa;  
 For the simmer is coming, cauld winter's awa,  
 And I'll come and see thee in spite o' them a'.

O Sandy has owsen, has gear, and has kye,  
 A house, and a haddin, and siller forbye;  
 But I wad hae Jamie wi's staff in his hand,  
 Before I'd hae Sandy wi's houses and land.

He said, think na, &c.

My daddy looks sulky, my minny looks sour,  
 They frown upon Jamie because he is poor;  
 But daddy and minny altho' that they be,  
 There's nane o' them a' like my Jamie to me.

He said, think na, &c.

I sit on my creepie, and spin at my wheel,  
 And think on the laddie that lo'ed me sae weel;  
 He had but ae saxpence, he brak it in twa,  
 And ga'ed me the hauf o't, when he gaed awa.

Then haste ye back, Jamie, and bide na awa,  
 Then haste ye back, Jamie, and bide na awa;  
 The simmer is coming, cauld winter's awa,  
 And ye'll come and see me in spite o' them a'.

Besides those pieces already mentioned, Halket is also said to have written a dialogue between the Devil and George II., a copy of which having, in 1746, fallen into the hands of the Duke of Cumberland, "a reward of £100 was offered for the author, dead or alive". This, and a long ballad, "Schism Displayed", printed at Oxford, we have never seen.