

No account of the contemporaries of Andrew Shirrefs, in so far, at least, as they are connected with Scottish song, could be considered complete, which omitted to notice JOHN EWEN, the reputed author of "The Boatie Rows". We say reputed, for, though his name had been undisputedly connected with it for more than half-a-century, yet in 1841, in a collection of Scottish songs, with music, published in Glasgow, and edited by Dr. Patrick Buchan, a son of the celebrated ballad-collector, it was given forth that the song "was written at least one hundred years before honest John ever drew breath, and was called 'The Fisher's Rant of Fittie'". The writer goes on to say that the old ballad "was abridged by the late John Ewen, jeweller, for the purpose

of being sung by a Mr. Wilson [the volume we quote from is dedicated to him!] in the theatre of Aberdeen, when it became so popular as to be published by James Chalmers in one of the *Aberdeen Magazines*". It would have been something more to the purpose, if the writer of the above had given us a copy of the old ballad said to have been abridged by Mr. Ewen, for we have never met with anybody who has seen it or heard it, although we have made pretty diligent search. It is rather a curious fact too, that the writer of the above note, not only gives an imperfect copy of the song, but appends to it what he calls a stanza of the old ballad, but which in reality is one of the stanzas of the song as first published in 1788.

John Ewen, who for half-a-century was a prominent figure in Aberdeen society, and whose gentlemanly manners, benevolent disposition, staunch liberalism, and diligence in civic affairs are yet remembered amongst us, was born at Montrose in 1741, of very humble parents. It is generally supposed that his father was a wandering tinker; certainly John himself started life as a packman, for Bannerman, in his "*Aberdeen Worthies*," states that some citizens, whom he knew, remembered him "going about the country selling buckles, sleeve-buttons, penknives, &c." He commenced business as a jeweller in Aberdeen about 1770, and for a long series of years his shop, with the bowed windows, which looked up Castle Street from where the *Athenæum Restaurant* now stands, was the great resort of literary, artistic, and whiggish Aberdeen. He not only devoted a goodly portion of his time to the service of the community, and amassed a large fortune by the diligent and judicious management of his own trade affairs, but, though well up in years ere he began, yet succeeded in cultivating his mind, and storing it with such knowledge, as made him a desired and agreeable companion to the learned coterie, that circled round Professor Beattie while in the zenith of his fame. His musical talents and artistic tastes were strongly pronounced. He joined the Musical Society in 1784, and did much to encourage the tonal art among the citizens. The weekly subscription-concerts were at that time in full swing, with a body of amateur and professional performers, which would have graced any concert room in the kingdom. Francis Peacock, who, under the patronage of the Town

Council, taught dancing in a hall in Drum's Lane (afterwards an English School, now a lumber store), and who also achieved considerable reputation as a miniature painter and musical composer, often led at these concerts, and was another of the fine old gentlemen, who, like Mr. Ewen, gave tone to the society they moved in. Enticing as the subject is, we must not, however, allow ourselves to be drawn away into reminiscences of the silk-stockin'g'd, knee-breech'd gentlemen, who form such an interesting and picturesque group of Aberdeen worthies during the closing years of last century; we must return to honest John. In every good work connected with city improvements, or the advancement of rising genius, Mr. Ewen was an earnest worker; indeed, we have to thank his persistent perseverance for the first effective measure that gave better paving, lighting, and cleansing, to the streets of Aberdeen. It was also to him that Nasmyth recommended the young artist Seaton, whose china-ink view of Castle Street in 1806 has lately been reproduced in facsimile. Ewen patronised him liberally, and, among other products of his pencil, is said to have possessed a very rare collection of his views of "the Lakes". This promising artist, a native of the north of England, taught drawing in Aberdeen for some years, but died of consumption at Kendal in 1808. After a long and useful career, John Ewen, who for some time had retired from business, died 21st October, 1821, leaving the greater part of his fortune, some £16,000, for the endowment of an hospital at Montrose, similar to that which Robert Gordon had founded in Aberdeen. His daughter, an only child, who had married against her father's will, disputed the settlement, and, after years of litigation, got a decision in her favour from the House of Lords. If all accounts are true, she did not enjoy it long; her husband, who had deserted her, returned from America, and is said to have taken possession of the greater part of the property. Probably John's judgment about the marriage was not far wrong. It may be justly said, however, that Mr. Ewen lived and died respected by all who knew him, as a clear-headed, intelligent, cultured, kindly man, and who (above all to us now) added one more imperishable item to the songs of dear auld Scotland. We subjoin the song as first printed in the *Aberdeen Magazine* for August, 1788:—

THE FAVOURITE SONG OF "THE BOATIE ROWS."

(The words by a gentleman of Aberdeen. Adapted to music by Mr. Wilson.)

I.

O weel may the boatie row,
 An' better may she speed,
 O leesome may the boatie row
 That wins the bairns bread.

The boatie rows, the boatie rows,
 The boatie rows indeed,
 And happy be the lot of a'
 That wishes her to speed.

II.

O leesome may the boatie row
 That fills a heavy creel,
 And claithes us a' frae head to fit,
 And buys the pottage meal.

The boatie rows, the boatie rows,
 The boatie rows weel,
 And lightsome be her load wha bears
 The murlin and the creel.

III.

Whan Jemmy vow'd he wad he mine,
 And wan frae me my heart,
 Ah! muckle lighter grew my creel,
 He swore we'd never part.

The boatie rows, the boatie rows,
 The boatie rows weel,
 And muckle lighter is the load,
 Whan love bears up the creel.

IV.

My curtch I pat upon my head,
 And deck'd mysel' fu' bra',
 I trow my heart was douff and wae,
 Whan Jemmy gaed awa'.

The boatie rows, the boatie rows,
 The boatie rows indeed;
 And happy be the lot of a'
 Wha wishes her to speed.

V.

Whan Sanny, Jock, and Jannettie,
 Are up, and gotten lair,
 They'll help to gar the boatie row
 And lighten a' our care.

The boatie rows, the boatie rows,
The boatie rows weel,
And leesome may the boatie row
That wins the bairns meal.

VI.

And whan wi' age we're borne down,
And hirplin' roun' the door,
They'll row and keep us warm and dry,
As we've done them before.

The boatie rows, the boatie rows,
The boatie rows indeed,
And happy be the lot of a'
Wha wishes her to speed.
