

One of Shirrefs's Aberdeen acquaintances was WILLIAM FARQUHAR, the author of "Poems on Several Occasions, consisting of Elegies and Epistles, Miscellanies and Scottish Pieces. Edinburgh, printed for the author, 1794". He was a most erratic genius, but full of that happy-go-lucky spirit which, joined to his love of poetry and the drama, could not fail to endear him to Shirrefs. Almost all that is known about him is learned from his own poems, but, as he was neither very thin-skinned nor reticent, we find quite enough there for our purpose. He was a merchant in Aberdeen, and an occasional writer of prose and verse to the *Caledonian Magazine*. Several of the pieces in his published volume appeared originally in that periodical two of which we may note—one an elegy on the death of Miss Gordon, the other an answer to a letter that had appeared in the magazine twitting the "merchants" for standing or walking before their shop doors. Farquhar, "being a merchant", entered the lists in defence of the shopkeepers. Sometime before he migrated to Aberdeen he had been a merchant about Slains, where he seems to have occasionally indulged his liking for dramatic representation. Here is an epilogue spoken there after a representation of "Douglas":—

We'll sirs, we're dane, fat ha'e ye a' to say?  
I think we've acted gayly this braw Play;  
Gin ye're content, I'se mak but little din,  
Tho' I'd fain pit ye in a merry pin  
Afore I leave you freely. It's the vogue  
To sic braw shows to gie an Epilogue.  
Fat think ye, Sirs, o' sic a tragic core,  
Wha never acted on a stage afore.  
An' as I'm dane wi' a' my waefu' cracks,  
Like a leel Merchan' I'll gae lift my packs.  
But e'er I do't, I fain wad hae your ear,  
To hear a fyle the roosin' o' my ware.  
Wha wad ha'e thought that Randolph held the plough,  
Or wis the sin o' honest William Touch.

An' now we'll jist stap o'er anent the bogg  
 To tell ye Douglas is plain Geordy Hogg.  
 Fu' we'l ye ken the ale-wife o' the town  
 Wha's mither to Glenalvon, that great lown.  
 Auld Norval's dady is a sturdy smith,  
 Wha yarks at iron goads wi' a' his pith.  
 My faithfu' Anna is the parson's sin.  
 An' for mysel', I sanna voust my kin.  
 There's no ane here but kens the Merchin' weil;  
 To tell the truth he's bat a ram'lin' chiel;  
 An' fegs I'm fear't he mith as well hae dane,  
 Gin in Auld Christy's housie he had been  
 Sellin' his gear to some braw canty wife,  
 Winnin' a penny to had in his life.  
 But gin ye'll a' wi' him gang o'er the gate,  
 A fouth o' pigs an' groceries ye sall get;  
 An' as ye're come to see his tragic pranks,  
 For this kin' visit tak' his hearty thanks.

Sometime about 1790 he turns up in Edinburgh in the capacity of what he calls "printer's devil" to Moir, who subsequently printed the above-mentioned volume of verse. Farquhar apparently did not relish the "devil" business, for he left Edinburgh for the north in 1791, and settled down to what he calls his "hin'most shift" as a bookseller and keeper of a circulating library in Peterhead. How long this lasted we cannot tell, but three years after he reappeared in Edinburgh, and published his poems, which he dedicated "To Sir James Stirling, Bart., Lord Provost of Edinburgh, and Colonel of the Edinburgh Volunteers, and to the officers and gentlemen who compose that patriotic band". In an epistle to Mr. Moir, the author describes himself as

A thriftless chiel,  
 Whom ilk ane ca's a neer-do-weel.

And in another to "James Rait, Aberdeen", he describes his condition in Edinburgh, in 1790, as follows:—

Well, now I really think 'tis time  
 To tell you where I live, in rhyme;  
 In Edinburgh my lot is cast,  
 I'm anchor'd there I think at last;  
 Tho' troth, not in a pleasant station,  
 But much against my inclination.

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For here I suffer every evil,  
 And am become a printer's Devil.  
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 I left my business, clos'd my shop,  
 Gave up for fancy'd, solid hope ;  
 Left Aberdeen with pride elate,  
 But found my blunder, tho' too late.  
 Then round Edina's streets I wander'd  
 Where for my folly I was slander'd.  
 To generous Moir I then apply'd,  
 Who, as he could, my wants supply'd,  
 And to prevent a greater evil,  
 Gave me the honour'd post of Devil.

The Miscellanies contained in his volume are for the most part like his elegies—dull heroics; and were it not for occasional items like the above, we would have to say the same of his epistles. The Scottish verses are much better, and from them we quote the following “Address intended to have been printed on the opening of the Author's Circulating Library at Peterhead”:

Here's Willie Farquhar's hinmost shift,  
 At a' thing else he had no thrift,  
 Come in then, lads an' gi'e 'm a lift,  
                   His buiks are bonny,  
 An' ye may plainly see his drift  
                   Is to mak' money.

Gin ilka chiel in Peterhead,  
 Wad come to's shop for buiks to read,  
 He sud get warks, wad fill his head  
                   Wi' thrifty notions;  
 Or, gin he thocht it wis as guid,  
                   Wi' sleepy potions.

For authors are like other men,  
 They dinna a' tak' up the pen,  
 Wi' an intent their win' to spen',  
                   To mak' ye vogie,  
 Bat sometimes sleepin' recommen',  
                   As weil's a cogie.

Bat there are unco few o' mine  
 That are o' this wile dozen'd kin'  
 Na! they are buiks that fills the min  
                   Nae wi' fool buff,  
 Bat wi Benevolence divine  
                   An sic guid stuff.