

IN the year 1655, a poem was printed in London, which, apart from the local interest of its subject, has had such a curious and eventful history as cannot fail to give it an interest in the eyes of all who love our native muse, or who are given to collecting on their bookshelves the scarce and out-of-the-way products of the Aberdeen press. We refer to the locally well-known poem, "Don," first published in 1655, and which for many a day has been a great favourite throughout the length and breadth of the shire. In *Notes and Queries* for December 5, 1851, a communication signed "Stonehaven" appears, in which it is stated that the poem was "reprinted in 1674, and again in 1742 with little or no alteration, and continued in that state till 1796". This is scarcely correct. It may have been reprinted in 1674, although we have never seen nor heard of that edition, but when reprinted in 1742, the editor in his preface states that he not only "adds several beautiful seats on the Don, which were omitted in the former (1655) edition", but also, lines "on the late Earl Marischal and his brother, General Keith". In fact, the title page to the copy of 1742 states that the poem had been "printed in the year 1655, reprinted with *additions*". The extent of these additions can only be approximately reached by us; as, like the writer in *Notes and Queries*, we have never seen an earlier copy than that of 1742, and can therefore only guess by the dates of events or persons mentioned, what has been added and what belongs to the earlier edition. The next appearance of the poem is in Aberdeen at the close of last century, when there

was offered to the public, "Don, a poem, &c., by Charles Dawson, schoolmaster at Kemnay. Aberdeen: Printed for Charles Dawson, by Burnett and Rettie, Netherkirkgate, 1797". This was no other than a sadly mutilated copy of the 1742 edition, in which the dominie altered a few rhymes, and added to the whole, more voluminous notes than he found in the copy he pirated. The local interest of the subject made the poem sell, however; and, in 1805, another edition, still purporting to be by Charles Dawson, was issued to meet the growing demand. About 1813, a gentleman in Edinburgh having accidentally fallen in with a copy of the 1742 edition, sent it to press in its entirety, and in 1814 the public learned for the first time that the *whole* of Dawson's "Don" had been in print for 50 years, and the *greater part of it* for nearly 150 years before he sent it to his Aberdeen printers. One would have thought that an exposure like this should have been equal to settling the schoolmaster of Kemnay's pretensions; but, strange to say, in 1819, the "indefatigable" Peter Buchan issued from his Auchmedden press "Don, a Poem, &c., by Charles Dawson". Peter's eyes, however, must have very soon been opened, as in his "History of the Keith Family", published early in the following year, he quotes a long extract "from an old poem printed in London in the year 1655, but reprinted with the following additions in the year 1742"—an extract which he had recently issued as by the then or late schoolmaster of Kemnay! At last, a small 12mo. copy was, in 1849, printed at the Hattonian press, Fintray, by John Cumming, in the preface to which the poem is said to have been written by "Mr. Forbes of Brux". That Arthur Forbes of Brux, half-brother to the eleventh Lord Forbes, and whose sister was married to one of the Roses of Kilravock, should have written the poem as first published is highly probable, for he is the only member of the family, at that time, who has left any trace of having possessed the rhyming faculty. In his old age (he was born about 1630) he composed a rather good poetical epitaph to the memory of Robert Barclay, the Quaker apologist. It is written in the same heroic couplet as the "Don", and has no small merit in it, as epitaphs go. It opens thus:—

There be too few, that take a true delight
 On virtuous subjects a few lines to write ;
 In this degenerate age most poets uses
 On scurril rimes for to extend their muses :
 On gilded nothings they their fancies strain,
 Such as patch'd plays, like to unhing their brain ;
 And think by this their hearers to excite,
 To satiate their carnal appetite :
 As if to forge and lie were not a crime ;
 They thus exhaust their talent and their time.
 To shun the Scilla, and my self acquit
 Unto his friend, I offer this small mite.

When we come to the question of the authorship of the additions in the copy of 1742, matters get a little clearer. In the *Scots Magazine*, April, 1741, we find verses "to C——l F——s upon reading some of his works, particularly 'Don, a poem', celebrating the memory of some Scots heroes". This was probably Alexander Forbes, the seventh son of Sir William Forbes of Craigievar by Margaret Rose, daughter of Hugh Rose of Kilravock, and who was spoken of in his early years as "a child of an ardent spirit, and of so strong and beautiful a genius, that in the twelfth year of his age, he has write poems which are read by all with admiration". He was born at Lamington about 1715, and died unmarried in foreign service, 1746. Of the other works indicated by the writer of the poem in the *Scots Magazine* we have found no record.

The amended and extended version of this old poem, which was given to the world in 1742, is dedicated to Hugh Rose of Kilravock, who for many years was M.P. for Ross-shire. It contains some fifteen hundred lines—opens with an invocation to Pallas to succour the author in his attempt to sing the "Donean Heroes", and begins its subject proper by tracing the higher sources and tributaries of "the Forbes' river". Starting at Kildrummy, as the first noble seat on its banks, the author extols the loyalty of the Earl of Mar, and bemoans the degeneracy of courtiers during the Cromwellian times. In fact, throughout the whole conduct of the piece the various seats on the river, as might be expected in such a work, are less the subject of treatment, than mere pegs on which to hang telling bits of family history, strictures on current movements, and

contrasts of "the good old times" with the more degenerate present. Thus, when we come to Brux, we have a long and graphic account of how it became the seat of the Forbeses.

The lovely heiress of the Cameron race,
 In ancient days was mistress of this place ;
 A tender virgin, she alone was left,
 Of father and of brothers all bereft,
 By the base Muat, who possess'd Braemar
 And 'gainst the Donean youth engaged in war.
 Kildrummy's lord was guardian to the fair,
 And brought her up with a paternal care ;
 The virgin vow'd, none should possess her charms,
 But he who, for her love, in glittering arms,
 Should own her quarrel in the dusty field,
 And there revenge her cause with sword and shield.
 Drimminor's son, with warlike heat inspir'd
 To serve the nymph by whom his heart was fir'd,
 The dang'rous task with ardour took in hand,
 To free the country from the treach'rous band.
 The barb'rous Muat all these threats despise,
 Vain of his force and his gigantic size,
 Dar'd the brave youth to join in open field,
 Arm'd with the helmet, with the sword and shield,
 Near Bucket's stream, upon the eighth of May,
 To meet, and there decide the doubtful day :
 Six hundred men array'd in warlike weed,
 Who knew to use their arms in time of need,
 With him he'd bring, or, if he durst rely,
 On his own force, himself should him defy.

It was agreed that their armed retainers should stand "two bow shots" distant, while the two leaders should by themselves try "the fate of arms", and

In constant peace, they vow'd with him to live,
 To whom great Jove the victory should give.

On these conditions young Forbes of Drimminor and Muat of Abergeldie stepped forth to battle :—

The distance known, with eager haste they run,
 Their swords and helmets glittering in the sun :
 This on his manly confidence relies,
 That on his vigour and superior size.
 Their eyes all fire, like lions they engage
 With equal eagerness and equal rage ;
 Both in full vigour, equal in their prime,
 Doubtful the battle lasted for a time ;

Their shining helmets were in pieces torn,
 And all their shields with blows in tatters shorn;
 But Forbes, mad to be in conquest slow,
 Invok'd his goddess' name, and grasp'd his foe;
 With his keen skien, he through every part,
 Pierc'd his steel jacket, till he reach'd his heart:
 Squeeze'd in his arms, he gasped still for breath,
 Till his wing'd soul past thro' the gates of death.
 The lifeless carcass from his arms he flung,
 Which stretch'd along, the brook with murmurs rung:
 At which the Muats' sorrow pierc'd the skies,
 With doleful howlings and with dismal cries;
 Whilst Forbes' clan receiv'd the warlike boy,
 With songs of praises, and with shouts of joy.

Again, the mention in the narrative of the bond of alliance made between the Forbeses, the Clanchattan, and the Roses of Kiltravock, brings to the mind's eye of the author a picture of the *then* and *now* when General Monk was disarming the Scots, and he breaks forth:—

Ye gods, such glorious days could we but see,
 Or could we like our ancestors agree,
 We still might hope to set our country free.
 But, O, great Jove! how differ we from those,
 We tamely yield submissive to our foes?
 Us they disarm, and keep their hatred still,
 And, when they prosper, without mercy kill.
 What greater grief can any *Scotsman* seize,
 Than see his brethren brought to terms like these;
 To seek forgiveness, fighting for the laws,
 And need a pardon in their country's cause.
 Robb'd of our weapons, they oppress secure,
 And soon to bear their yoke will us inure;
 I weep to think the slavery *Scots* endure.

Occasionally we get an account of the nature of the soil, the general appearance of the country, a note of its natural products, and so forth, the best of which appears to us to have been one of the additions to the older poem, as the writer speaks of—

The huge large bulls which in our meadows feed,
 In whiteness, strength, and beauty far exceed
 The choicest kind of fam'd *Clytumna's* breed.

—a description of a kind of cattle which had only begun to be imported from the south, when the advances made in agricul-

ture during the eighteenth century demanded heavier, stronger beasts than those of the native stock.

The soil, though thin, due nourishment supplies,
 And without art the beauteous berries rise;
 Some black, some blue, and some whose red can vie
 With brightest scarlet of rich *Tyrian* dye.
 The wholesome *Everan*, which by proof we know
 Exceed in sweetness most of fruits that grow,
 'Mongst *Woodrip* rising, beautify the shew.
 The best of liquorish other soils produce,
 Is far inferior to the *Knappert's* juce:
 Dug from the ground, wash'd in the bubbling spring,
 Dried in the sun, in baskets home they bring;
 In wooden cans, within the shady bower,
 Upon the roots they crystal water pour;
 Which drunk next day is exquisitely good,
 Both fit for health, and to digest the food.
 Such fruits, such roots, our blooming braes adorn,
 Whilst the low plains are clad with ripening corn.
 Indulgent heaven grants this like open air,
 To cheer and feast our shepherds everywhere;
 Who piping on the hills rejoice to see
 The careful work of the laborious bee;
 Who dares not, when the stormy winds arise,
 Display her golden pinions to the skies;
 Nor tread secure from sportive kids and sheep,
 Who morning dew from flowers and blossoms sweep;
 But culls the sweets from berries on the ground,
 Which in no other soil are better found;
 Till milder zephyrs fan a softer breeze,
 They then in haste invade the forest trees,
 And sip the morning dew at their own ease:
 And when with care they have their bellies fill'd
 From oaken leaves, with honey half distill'd
 They spread their wings, and cut the liquid air,
 Fly to their hives, and there unload with care,
 And for a new supply of sweets prepare.

The poem also contains some admirable battle-pieces, notably Brechin, where Black Arthur, son of Lord Forbes—

. . . like a torrent, with impetuous force,
 Bore down resisting foes both foot and horse,
 As Homer, godlike Hector makes appear,
 Blazing in front, or plung'd within the rear,
 Black Arthur rises no less dreadful here.

Such life of soul his sparkling eyes exprest,
 That courage blaz'd abroad, and fir'd the rest.
 He animates the troops where'er he goes,
 And darts, like lightning, terror thro' his foes:
 All who oppose he hurls to certain death,
 And cooling rage re-kindles at his breath.

An account of Harlaw is also given with much minuteness—the onslaught of the Keiths and Forbeses, the “gallant Gordons”, and all the other men of might, being fully sung in telling patriotic strains.

MAR led the centre close, his wings at large,
 Advancing keen, in order, to the charge.
 The noble KEITH joined ROBERT in the van,
 Who led the friends and followers of the clan.
 DRUM, with the LEITHS and LESLIES of *Balquhoin*,
 Upon the left the gallant GORDONS join.
 Viewing the troops, with joy, the general said:
 “Your king and country claim your gen'rous aid.
 Captains and chiefs your brave efforts unite,
 Let great example all the rest excite:
 By martial deeds, in sight of either host,
 Maintain the glory of the race you boast:
 To animate the brave, there needs no more
 Than thoughts of what their fathers were before.”
 The signal given, the pipes and trumpets sound
 The direful charge; the neighbouring hills resound
 “The joining battles shout, the dreadful peal
 Bounds from the rocks, and thunders down the vale.”
 The glens and coves return the doubling roar,
 Till dying echo can repeat no more.

First KEITH and FORBES to the battle flew,
 The brave example all the rest pursue.
 Here, like rapacious wolves, the foes engage,
Scots rush on *Scots*, and all was blood and rage.
 The brave MACLEAN fought on MACDONALD's right,
 And like the mountain bear maintain'd the fight:
 Though sorely wounded, press'd, and bath'd in blood,
 He kept his ground, and made his party good:
 Still us'd to conquer, and unknown to yield,
 He hopes to gain the glory of the field.
 At last the LESLIES bord'ring on the DON,
 Fir'd by the chief who led the warriors on,
 First pierc'd the ranks, and broke MACDONALD's horse,
 And taught the foe to own superior force.

* * * * *

Great DONALD, when he saw MACLEAN was lost,
 The pride, the strength, the bulwark of his host,
 He groan'd, he sigh'd, and vow'd he ne'er would yield,
 But whilst he breath'd, with blood would dye the field.
 DAV'DSON he slew, and brave HUGH ROSE bore back,
 And thousands perish'd in this fierce attack ;
 Together close all join, and here, pell mell,
 In countless numbers many brave men fell ;
 Too many royal heroes, rebels slew,
 Whose souls in haste to blest *Elysium* flew.
 Here many a gallant youth o'erspread the plain,
 And all the field lay cover'd with the slain.

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Till KEITH called ROBERT, and was heard to say,
 "Ourselves must force the rebels to give way."
 As seas on seas drive furious to the shore,
 When angry NEPTUNE makes his billows roar,
 They with impetuous force drove o'er the plain ;
 To stem their fury all attempts were vain.
 Who can relate, what muse in verse display,
 The dreadful slaughter of the bloody day ?
 Or who count o'er the warriors that lay slain,
 By KEITH and FORBES on the fatal plain ?
 Disdain and conscious virtue fir'd each breast,
 And with redoubl'd force their foes they prest :
 All who oppos'd, to the dark shades they sent,
 By flight, scarce DONALD could his death prevent.

But leaving these feats of the brawny arm, and dropping down the stream past many beautiful seats, on and about which our author descants delightfully, we cross the Brig o' Don, and enter our own town, to find foremost among its most famous features—our "bonnie lasses."

Sure you'll be charmed to see the lovely fair,
 With graceful mien, and with becoming air,
 At rural sports upon the velvet green,
 Outstrip all nymphs you ever yet have seen ;
 Their eyes, like stars, shine with celestial fire
 With all the charms that beauty can inspire.
 No blushing rose displays such lovely red,
 As nature here upon their cheeks has spread.
 The glowing rubies, which so precious are,
 Dare not in beauty with their lips compare.
 Their teeth like polished ivory, white and bright,
 In perfect order placed, the eye delight.

Their necks, well turn'd, and smooth, divinely fair,
 With heaving bosoms, beautiful appear
 More white, more soft, than flakes of falling snow,
 Although no Indian gems upon them glow.

* * * * *

If e'er they wed, they to their loves prove true,
 And their chief pleasure is in pleasing you;
 They cheer their parents, charm the husband's heart,
 With beauty, sense, and every work of art.
 Among those lovely nymphs you're sure to find
 Each virtue that adorns the female kind,
 With all the wish'd for beauties of the mind.

After describing our churches and colleges, enumerating a number of the brighter geniuses who have added to our civic renown, and noting the festive hospitality of our citizens, the author bemoans that Scotsmen generally are not like his "Donean youths", or else Cromwell's bondage would soon be over. This leads him to compare the wanderings of Charles II. to the fate of Ulysses, where he borrows largely from Pope's Homer; but anticipating the restoration of "the merry monarch," he concludes his poem thus:—

But till such happy days kind heaven shall give,
 Let thee and me, in peace, with virtue live;
 And when great Jove shall some brave youth inspire,
 To emulate the glories of his sire,
 Whose breast with godlike liberty shall glow,
 A friend to virtue and to vice a foe;
 To shine in arms, the tyrant to oppose,
 And stand the terror of fanatic foes;
 To rouse the British youth from shore to shore,
 To right their country, and their prince restore;
 Then, Hugh, let us among the first appear,
 To face the foe, and front the coming war,
 And with Clanchattan every danger share;
 To die, or conquer, as the gods think fit,
 And still with patience to their will submit.
 While those poor souls who have, for love of gold,
 Their virtue, honour, king, and country sold,
 And damn'd themselves to leave their children slaves,
 Like brutes will sink inglorious to their graves;
 Then after ages all their crimes shall tell,
 Thus liv'd the wretches, thus they sunk to hell:
 Whilst we in glory with our sires shall vie,
 Acting like them, we'll in our duty die.

Their shades will meet us on the Stygian lake,
Pleased with our actions for our country's sake;
With joy conduct our souls to blest abodes,
To mix with heroes, and to live with gods.
