

We must turn now for a moment to another son of song who never courted publicity for the out-pourings of his muse—the simple, genial, unobtrusive tailor, ALEXANDER WATSON, who, for close on 60 years, was a well-known figure among the trade burgesses of Bon-Accord. He was born in 1744, and died in 1831, in his 87th year. In the obituary notice, communicated to the *Aberdeen Observer* by one who knew him intimately, it is said:—“Mr. Watson was possessed of considerable poetic talent, and was well known as the author of that popular national song, ‘The Kail Brose o’ Auld Scotland’; but it is not perhaps so generally known that (besides several pieces of inferior note) he was also the author of that truly original and humorous song ‘The Wee Wifekie’. Indeed, when he heard that song ascribed to such men as Bishop Geddes [Dr. Alexander Geddes], Rev. John Skinner, and others ranked high in literary talent, it seemed to gratify him not a little, but he would only remark, ‘mony ane’s gotten the wyte o’ that bit thing’. On the writer of the present article asking him how such a ludicrous idea could enter his brain as the

subject of the song in question, he said, 'If there be any merit in clinking it together, it is mine ; but I have none whatever in framing the story, for it was told me by a loon from the country while working beside me.'” Regardless as the Deacon was of his literary work, he had an honest pride in the product of his needle, and thought it a bit of a shame that he was not mentioned in Moore’s “Life of Byron”, among the acquaintances of his lordship’s childhood, “considering that I made his lordship’s first pair o’ breeks”.

His well-known song, “The Kail Brose”, had a local popularity long before it reached the printer’s hands. Originally written by him during the time of the American War, when an English regiment stationed in Aberdeen roused his patriotism by persistently playing, “The Roast Beef of Old England”, it first appeared in print (as far as we have been able to trace) in 1819, as an anonymous song in *The Harp of Caledonia*. Long before that, however, it had made its way to Edinburgh, carried there probably by Shirrefs, who was a good singer of such songs, and even occasionally figured in that capacity in public. Indeed, we find mention made in one of the rhymed epistles which Davie Crawford, the Heriot’s Wark Poet, wrote to Shirrefs, while a printer at Shakespeare Square, in 1794, that certain things could be done before he’d “sing the Scottish Kail Brose”; and it was probably some such reminiscence of Shirrefs’ connection with the song that made Robert Chambers credit him with its authorship. We have been thus minute, because recently, Mr. Miller of Edinburgh, in a communication to the *Scotsman*, has claimed the song for his grandfather, William Brown, mentioned above. The version printed by Mr. Miller is certainly very like, yet very different, and on the whole much superior to, the Deacon’s song. But, that Mr. Brown may have improved and amended a song which took his fancy, and which was undoubtedly known in 1794 beyond the family circle to which all his other versicles were confined, is not at all incompatible with the grounds on which his grandson claims for him the authorship. Mr. Miller, in a letter now before us, says—“The verses published by me were undoubtedly written by my grandfather. I have been informed of this by my mother, his daughter, frequently, and as far back, at all events,

as some 50 years ago. *Of course*, she had it from her father, and she claimed for him, *as I understood*, not merely a particular version, but the being the author of the song". We have italicised the weak hinges of Mr. Miller's claim, not for the purpose of seeking to invalidate his statement, but rather to show, that all he really has to say on the subject may be quite correct, and the authorship of the original song yet remain with Deacon Watson. In 1851, the song, with three verses not given in the current copies, was printed in "Whistle Binkie" from the MS. of Watson, then in the possession of Peter Buchan. Indeed, Buchan, from his acquaintance with the Deacon, came into possession of almost all his MS. poetry, and would very likely have placed them in a collected form before the public, had the course of events been less turbid with him than it latterly turned out to be. The Deacon's song is well known and easily got at; we therefore append Brown's version. It is taken from a MS. "apparently copied out in 1812".

When our gutchers of auld made a troke wi' the laird  
 For a wee bit o' grund to be a kailyard,  
 It was to the brose that they had their regard.  
     O', the kail brose of auld Scotland,  
     And oh, the Scottish kail brose.

When their leal-hearted youngsters were roused frae repose,  
 Their frien's to defend or to conquer their foes,  
 They proved wi' a vengeance what pith there's in brose.  
     Oh, the kail brose, &c.

When Wallace an' Bruce turned the chase on their foes,  
 They saired them o' fighting wi' very few blows,  
 The bauldest cried out, "Let us turn; they've got brose"!  
     Oh, the kail brose, &c.

Then our sodgers were steel frae the heel to the nose,  
 Wi' the plaid an' the kilt, the claymore an' the hose,  
 An' the bag o' oatmeal at their backs to be brose.  
     Oh, the kail brose, &c.

At our annual elections for Baillies or Mayor,  
 Nae kickshaws o' puddin's or tarts were seen there;  
 But a dish o' gude brose was the favourite fare.  
     Oh, the kail brose, &c.

There was hotch-potch an' haggis, a feast for a lord,  
 An' sheeps' heads, the fattest our hills could afford;  
 But a dish o' gude brose was the king o' the board.  
     Oh, the kail brose, &c.

Whar then were our bucks, an' our bloods, an' our beaux,  
Wi' their lang-leggit breeks, an' their short-leggit hose?  
The devil a breek did we wear when we'd brose.

Oh, the kail brose, &c.

Our baby bit lassies buskit up to be shows,  
Their white-washen cheeks they would blush like the rose,  
Could they see how their grandmothers thrive upo' brose.

Oh, the kail brose, &c.

Nae born coupers then sought to gather a pose,  
By grindin' aff puir bodies faces the nose;  
But man, wife, an' wean, they got wamefu's o' brose.

Oh, the kail brose, &c.

But now that the Thistle is joined to the Rose,  
An' Scotchmen an' Englishmen nae mair at blows,  
We've lost a great deal of our relish for brose.

Alas! the kail brose, &c.

Yet still wi' the foremost we'll cock up our nose,  
An' deal out Scotch measure to a' our proud foes,  
Let the French then beware of our beef an' our brose.

Oh! the roast beef of Old England,  
And oh! the Scottish kail brose.

Yet gi'e but a Scotchman a cogue o' kail brose,  
A jorum o' whiskey, an' prime weel his nose,  
Wi' the French, wi' the Dons, wi' the Devil he'll close.

Oh, the kail brose, &c.

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