

## ALEXANDER ROBB.

FEW men, with the same limited lyrical faculty, have succeeded so well in amusing a considerable section of their fellow citizens by their rhymed effusions, as ALEXANDER ROBB, tailor, and deacon of the Tailor Corporation. He was born in 1781, and for well nigh half a century was one of the leading merchant tailors of Aberdeen. He early in life began to take an interest in local movements, was a fogleman in Finlason's Volunteers, a member of various musical and dramatic societies, and for some time acted as clerk in St. Paul's Chapel,—while in connection with local politics (the great hobby of his life) his ready muse and willing pen were ever on the move, framing some lilt

to be sung at the annual Trades dinner, or, through the columns of the local press, harassing his opponents with the sarcasm and satire that seemed native to his character. He was wise enough, however, never to allow any of these bits of bye play to encroach on his time further than as a means of relaxation from the more important duties of his business life. The sources of inspiration which set the deacon's pen a-going were not of the usual kind which poets proper look for—any sort of peg, on which a parody or lampoon could be hung, suited well enough the purpose of his humour. If the gossip of the moment turned on such an incident as the withdrawal of an item of public charity from such a sturdy beggar as Willie Godsmen, for the singing and hawking of satirical ballads directed against the magistracy—it gave the deacon immense glee to turn the laugh against the corporation by supplying the victim with a “Sorrowful lamentation for the loss of his Broth”. He did much in lines similar to the above in his earlier days, but when the reform movement came to the front, and even many years after the '32, local Liberal politicians, such as Alexander Bannerman, John Davidson, writer and general working-class champion, afforded splendid opportunities for the satire and wit of the irrepressible tailor. “The Whig's Supplication”, “The Banner-man Pibroch”, and “Whig Festival Extraordinary”, though comparatively pointless to the present generation, are excellent specimens of our author's political rhymes. In after years, when the fires of his enthusiasm in public movements burned lower, his muse returned more into the ordinary channels of song, and if he rarely reached the level of his earlier songs, “Love at the Bridge of Don”, and “Trades School Reminiscences”, he at least gave us some pleasant glimpses of old world life and character in the three pieces he contributed to the Wells' controversy. Late in life, a number of his friends urged upon him the desirability of collecting his verses, and, though very reluctant to do so (for the deacon was quite conscious of the shortcomings of his muse), they were at last issued in a neat little volume in 1852. Of the general contents we are safe to say that the merit of most of his pieces died with the circumstances which called them forth, and that many of the songs depended so much for

their enjoyableness on the style in which their author used to sing them, that, viewed in bald print, one is frequently at a loss to discover why they were ever sought to be preserved. Here is one of his best songs, sung at a meeting of the Hortus Club in 1847:—

AIR—"O'er the muir among the heather".

Whan Father Adam first was placed  
Langsyne in Eden's bonny garden,  
His cozie haddin' never cost  
The honest carl a single farthin'.  
Wi' want or care he ne'er was fash'd—  
His board an' lodgin' baith were gratis—  
His corn, as guid as e'er was thrash'd—  
Wi' lang, unscabbit, dry potatoes.

The luscious fruit o' various kinds,  
Drapt in his mou', like heavenly manna;  
An' he could raise his crap o' greens  
Without lime, sharn, or guano.  
Sae fertile was the lovely spot,  
He never needed to bespatter  
His grun' wi' ony kin' o' muck,  
Or Smith o' Deanston's stinkin' water.

Nae Hortus Clubs auld Adam knew—  
Nae prizes for the best carnation—  
For ilka flower spontaneous grew,  
Withouten toil or botheration.  
Their fragrant scent salutes his nose,  
As thro' his bonny yard he wanders;  
An' berries ripe aroun' him grows,  
As big as Davie Alexander's.

Oh! happy, happy was his life—  
He cared for neither win' nor weather—  
But growl'd until he gat a wife,  
Syne a' gaed heels o'er head thegither.  
Baith frae fair Eden soon were thrust—  
Wi' toil an' sweat to try their muscles—  
To till the grun', that now was curs't  
Wi' thorns, an' briars, an' burry thistles.

'Twas this ca'd forth the arts o' man  
To manufacture ploughs an' harrows;  
'Twas then that dunghills first began,  
An' spades, an' rakes, an' carts, an' barrows.

An' to the present day, of course,  
There evermair has been a movement,  
To circumvent the ancient curse,  
By agricultural improvement.

An' hence arose the various clubs,  
Against a barren soil to battle;  
Hence shows o' fruit, an' flowers, an' shrubs,  
An' breeds o' horses, sheep, an' cattle;  
An' hence our shows o' flowers to-day—  
Although we couldna' deen without them—  
Their names, you'll need to guess, for I  
Can never crook my mou' about them.

The deacon was never married, but one can readily see, from the poetical valentines and songs of an amorous nature which frequently employed his pen, that he knew something of the “dear delights” which accompany matrimonial preliminaries. His nature was eminently sociable, and many citizens still alive have warm recollections of the annual merry meetings in “Bachelor Ha'”, when their host would hail them to

. . . join in the sang then, the glee or the chorus,  
As lang an' as loud as ye like, ane an' a',  
Till the folk in the Adelphi' while hearin' the roar o's,  
Will wonder what's happenin' in Bachelors' Ha'.

He had a rich vein of epigrammatic wit about him, samples of which find a place in his volume, while in conversation among his friends, his ready humour and natural drollery, the latter more particularly noticeable in his singing, were much enjoyed. He died on the 28th December, 1859, at the ripe old age of 78.