

**THE BON-ACCORD BOOKLETS.  
NO. 5. A GARLAND FROM THE  
VERNACULAR AND OTHER  
VERSES OF THE REV. JOHN  
SKINNER OF LONGSIDE**

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The Bon-Accord Booklets. No. 5. A Garland from the Vernacular and Other Verses of the Rev.  
John Skinner of Longside by John Skinner

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*The Bon-Accord  
Booklets*

No. 5



*From an old photograph*

SKINNER'S COTTAGE AT LINSHART

A GARLAND  
FROM THE  
VERNACULAR AND OTHER VERSES  
OF THE  
REV. JOHN SKINNER  
OF LONGSIDE.

BEING A MEMORIAL BOOKLET OF HIS  
TWO-HUNDREDTH BIRTHDAY  
OCTOBER 5, 1721



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## PREFATORY NOTE

THIS issue of "Bon-Accord Booklets" we offer to our readers as a memento of the 200th anniversary of the birth of John Skinner, the parson-poet of Linshart, Longside, Aberdeenshire. It contains a few of the best texts of some of his vernacular writings which, to all lovers of the Scots Muse, have the abiding stamp of immortality.

John Skinner was born at Balfour in the Parish of Birse, 3rd October, 1721, his father being schoolmaster there. His mother died while he was still an infant, and his father, becoming parochial schoolmaster at Echt, removed there with his young son, who, under his careful tuition, was prepared for the University, which he entered as a Liddel Bursar in 1734, graduating in 1738. After leaving College he taught for some months at Kemnay, then as "inset-dominie" or assistant at Monymusk, where he finally resolved to join the Episcopal Church. He became tutor to a gentleman's son in Shetland in 1740, married a daughter of the Episcopal minister there in 1741, was ordained to the Episcopal charge at Longside, Nov. 1742, where he ministered faithfully for the long period of 64 years. He died suddenly at his son's house in Aberdeen, 16th June, 1807, and was buried in the churchyard of Longside.

He had an early love for Scots vernacular verse, "but," as he said in a letter to Burns, "on getting the black gown, I gave it pretty much over, till my daughters grew up, who being all tolerably good singers, plagued me for words to some of their favourite tunes, and so extorted those effusions which have made a public appearance beyond my expectations, and contrary to my intentions." Though he never contemplated publishing any of his songs, they soon spread abroad traditionally from mouth to mouth, so that as early as 1776 some of them got into type as slip-songs for chapmen and fair-singers, without the author's knowledge or consent, and with the usual verbal changes which always

accompany traditional texts. In the present selection, we have endeavoured to get as near to the Author's MSS. as it is now possible for us to do. "The dress in which they first appeared from his pen," says his son, "was that in which they were destined to make their way, as far as the circle of his acquaintances extended. Any attempt to change their appearances, Mr. Skinner would have deemed a needless waste of time and trouble" ("Posthumous Works," III, p. 121). Traditional texts, however, as we have said, always abound in at least verbal variations, with a tendency to degeneracy, and even in the Author's lifetime "Tullochgorum" was repudiated, in its supposed first text, by his family, as may be seen in the note prefixed to Ruddiman's text in May, 1776.

Coming now to the "Christmas Bawing," his son (Bishop John) in editing the Poems in Vol. III of his father's Posthumous Works, 1809, did not know that the MS. of that poem had been sent to Andrew Shirrefs, poet, printer, and publisher in Aberdeen, and had been printed in his "Caledonian Magazine or Aberdeen Repository" for September, 1788. He says (p. 98) that when reprinting, "it was with difficulty that a scroll was found in the author's handwriting." Whether any of the text given from that "scroll copy" has been edited by the Bishop or not, we cannot definitely say—though we strongly suspect it; but the different arrangement of stanzas, the deletions, the substitutions, and watering-down of phrases are very considerable, and almost always for the worse. Undoubtedly Shirrefs' text is the best and most authentic, and is, next to Rob Forbes' "Ajax," a perfect mine of the vernacular of the district as spoken and written in the middle of the eighteenth century. We have glossed at the foot of each page the more difficult words and phrases.

The Publishers are greatly indebted to Mr. William Walker, author of "The Bards of Bon-Accord," "Peter Buchan," etc., for valuable assistance and advice in the issuing of this publication.

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