

Address to General Dumourier on General Dumourier's Desertion from the French Army

I've previously written about Burns' poems titled *An Address to Beelzebub* and *Address to a Toothache* so to continue this theme I came across a poem that I hadn't even seen or heard of before, called *Address to General Dumourier on General Dumourier's Desertion from the French Army*. This piqued my curiosity and intrigued me so off to Wikipedia for my research. I soon found out that Burns' short poem in which Burns actually mis-spells his name, it is correctly spelled '**Dumouriez**' could lead very quickly and easily to a topic that we have discussed previously in the Club, but is also worth re-visiting with a slightly different perspective.

Who you might ask was General Dumourier? Well, **Charles-François du Périer Dumouriez**, (26 January 1739 – 14 March 1823) was a [French](#) general born in January 1739 and died in England in 1823. During the [French Revolutionary Wars](#), he joined the [Jacobin Club](#) in Paris in 1789, some said more for political advancement, than ideological reasons.

A quick aside on Jacobins, they were a political movement in Revolutionary France chiefly run by Robespierre. Initially they were more interested moderating the absolutism of the French monarchy, but radicals within the group quickly took over advocating more extreme Republicanism. They were the most dominant force in Revolutionary France after the execution of Louis XVI.

So, if we compare them to the Jacobites, who advocated the Restoration of James II and his line of the Stuarts who held absolutist beliefs, like the 'divine right of kings', Jacobins were Republicans, advocating less power to the monarch and other ideas like the separation of church and state. From this point of view they are at opposite ends of the political spectrum in their respective times. Makes one wonder therefore, how could a person be one and both at the same time. Maybe this shows us an even cleverer side of Burns!

But back to Dumouriez, he must have been quite politically astute, for in 1790, Dumouriez was appointed French military advisor to the newly established independent Belgian government and remained dedicated to the cause of an independent Belgian Republic. In June 1791 he gets promoted to Major General and in March 1792, became the French minister of foreign affairs, but later that year he put his general's hat back on and with other revolutionaries assisted in winning the key battle of Valmy, which repulsed an invasion by the Austrians and the Germans and later that year severely defeated the [Austrians](#) at [Jemappes](#).

Dumouriez has been described as a true revolutionary in the sense that he believed that nations, which had undergone a revolution, in this instance France, should give aid to oppressed countries, therefore after these military victories, he was ready to invade Belgium and to spread revolution. However, nothing became of this initiative and things started to fall apart in his life. He returned to Paris on 1 January 1793 and worked during the trial of Louis XVI to save him from execution so to the more radical elements in Paris, it became clear that Dumouriez was not a true patriot. Then in March 1793, after a major defeat in the [Battle of Neerwinden](#) he made a desperate move to save himself from his radical enemies by attempting to persuade his troops to march on Paris and overthrow the revolutionary government. The attempt failed, and Dumouriez defected to the Austrian camp and was subsequently denounced as a traitor. Dumouriez did not have a happy time in exile. He was not trusted by the French

exiles in Cologne or Stuttgart, or on his travels in Switzerland or Italy. Eventually he settled in England, where between 1812 and 1814 he was an active adviser to the Castlereagh ministry and died in 1823.

Burns's poem was most likely written after he had found out about Dumouriez's defection to the Austrians in 1793 and in it he mentions Dampière one of the generals who served in Dumouriez's army, while Bournonville was the Minister of War.

You're welcome to Despots, Dumourier;

You're welcome to Despots, Dumourier:

How does Dampiere do?

2nd in command

Aye, and Bournonville too?

Minister of War

Why did they not come along with you, Dumourier?

I will fight France with you, Dumourier,

I will fight France with you, Dumourier:

I will fight France with you,

I will take my chance with you;

By my soul I'll dance with you, Dumourier.

Then let us fight about, Dumourier;

Then let us fight about, Dumourier;

Then let us fight about,

Till freedom's spark is out,

Then we'll be damn'd, no doubt, Dumourier.

So what to make of this poem. At first reading he's on the side of Dumourier, he sympathizes with what he's fighting for and against the new order in France. Then he questions why his

colleagues Dampiere, his 2nd in command and Bournonville, French War Minister aren't with him.

Not only is the poem short and quite obscure, it's not as well known as some of his other revolutionary poems and songs, such as Ode to George Washington and Tree of Liberty, but let's face it, it's not that good. Nevertheless it got me thinking some more about Burns and Politics and was Burns a Jacobite or a Jacobin? It's been said there is enough in Burns's poetry and his letters to present him as, variously, a democrat, a republican, a revolutionary, a fervent Scottish nationalist, a loyal Briton and an internationalist champion of the brotherhood of man (Pittock, Edinburgh Companion 61).

Now, since during this period the political parties and their political stances changed so frequently, it is even harder to judge Burns' affiliations. An argument could even be made that Burns was at the same time both a Jacobite and a Jacobin.

On the Jacobin side, Burns knew of the revolt in America and of the revolution in France and these probably awakened thoughts of democracy and so he saw himself as a supporter of equality, liberty, and the people. He was however, conscious of the fact that as an Exciseman writing and publishing even such a poor attempt at a 'revolutionary' poem would not be conducive to his promotion prospects and in turn his salary and income. It is therefore believed that the poem wasn't actually published until long after his death, in 1810.

However the French Revolution counted for very little in the poetry of Burns. Can you tell me how many of his works identify or even mention the French Revolution? Maybe it was because the Revolution didn't really get under way until 1789.

But ultimately he believed constantly and passionately in Scotland, in 'the brotherhood of man' and in the rights of the ordinary man. He gave his moral encouragement to all the people who struggled for freedom, an example being 'A Slave's Lament'.

In his autobiographical letter to John Moore, Burns described his recognition of his feelings for Scotland: '... the story of Wallace poured a Scottish prejudice in my veins which will boil along there till the flood-gates of life shut in eternal rest.' This statement I would interpret as being more Jacobite than Jacobin, as is also represented, by poems such as 'Ye Jacobites By Name' and 'There'll never be peace till Jamie comes hame'

The church is in ruins, the State is in jars,

Delusions, oppressions and murderous wars,

We dare na weel say't, but we ken wa's to blame

There'll never be peace till Jamie comes hame!

He was of course convinced that his grandfather had suffered because of his 'affiliation' to the Stuarts and the Jacobite cause and the very thought of the family, the Hanoverians, who had replaced them on the British throne was anathema to him,

***The injur'd STEWART-line are gone,
A Race outlandish fill their throne;
An idiot race, to honor lost;
Who know them best despise them most.-***

But wait, remember what a close friend of Burns, James McKitterick Adair, said of him and his crony, William Nicol, both of whom had previously expressed themselves as ardent Jacobites, suddenly pledged their support for the French democrats in the Jacobin party. Then of course, if you recall, in a reckless moment, Burns attempted to send four carronades to the French Assembly although it is unlikely they reached their intended destination; however, this act and reports of him proposing seditious toasts in Dumfries, brought him under close scrutiny concerning his political activities. Not the sort of activities an Excise man should be participating in, right.

Finally, we may assert that he contributed to the decrease of 'class distinction' by pinpointing inequality as far as classes are concerned in his classical poem, 'A Man's a Man'

Ye see yon birkie, ca'd a lord,
Wha struts, an' stares, an' a' that;
Tho' hundreds worship at his word,
He's but a coof for a' that:
For a' that, an' a' that,
His ribband, star, an' a' that:
The man o' independent mind
He looks an' laughs at a' that.

A prince can mak a belted knight,
A marquis, duke, an' a' that;
But an honest man's abon his might,
Gude faith, he maunna fa' that!
For a' that, an' a' that,
Their dignities an' a' that;
The pith o' sense, an' pride o' worth,
Are higher rank than a' that.