

Scottish Industrial Undertakings before the Union

I

IN a previous article in the *Scottish Historical Review*¹ some account was given of the movement to introduce improved methods of production into Scotland in the latter half of the seventeenth century. I have now collected such details as are recoverable of certain individual undertakings, partly as examples of the general tendency, partly from the intrinsic interest of the concerns themselves. For reasons explained in the article already alluded to, the Parliamentary papers preserve some record of the various businesses that applied for the privileges of the Act of 1681 for the encouraging of trade and manufactures. From this mass of references without illustrative detail it will be advisable to select certain groupings of undertakings of cognate character, since one will frequently be found to throw light on others of a similar nature. From 1660 to 1690 there is a fairly well-marked order of development, first the founding of soap and sugar works, and concurrently, but continuing later, of cloth factories. After 1690 the establishment of industries of a more miscellaneous character became common. Thus the present series of articles may be most fitly commenced by some account of the Glasgow sugar refineries and soap works. Subsequently the textile group and allied trades will be dealt with, and finally the miscellaneous undertakings. It may further be premised that in the case of three companies, the Newmills Cloth Works, the Bank of Scotland, and the Darien Company, the materials are so copious that any adequate account of these would extend beyond reasonable limits, so that no attempt will be made to treat of them except incidentally.

¹ January, 1904.

THE GREENLAND FISHING AND SOAP WORKS COMPANY,
OR THE GLASGOW SOAPERIE (1667-1785).

The manufacture of soap from an early period had been a favourite industry for the establishment of monopolies. In the time of James I. and Charles I. the production of this commodity was involved in a net-work of exclusive grants. The searches, fines, and imprisonments carried out at the instigation of the Society of Soapers of Westminster created no little indignation in England.¹ Scotland did not escape the effects of the same policy. In 1619 a patent was granted to Nathaniel Uddart for the manufacture of soap. Having erected 'a goodly work' at Leith, he petitioned the Privy Council on June 21st, 1621, that all foreign soap should be prohibited. In reply the Privy Council ordain that the importation of soap should be forbidden, provided that Uddart would sell that made by him at a price not exceeding 24s. per barrel for green soap and 32s. per barrel of white soap, the barrel to contain 16 stones. By July, 1623, several complaints had been made to the Council, and it was decreed that the privileges granted in 1621 should terminate in a year from the date of the order.² Probably this patent, if not recalled, was allowed to lapse, for in 1634 a new grant was made to the 'King's daily servitor,' Patrick Mauld of Panmure. In as much as Mauld was prepared to provide all the requisites for soap-boiling, and since the trade was of such a nature that the public would suffer if 'it were left indifferently to all,' the monopoly of making all kinds of soap was granted to Mauld and his representatives for thirty-one years. In addition, the patent licensed the grantee to fish in the Greenland and home seas to obtain the oil then required for the production of soap. He had also the sole right of making potash by utilising such wood as is most fit for the purpose, likewise all sorts of ferns and vegetable things whatsoever. As in other grants by the Stuarts, Mauld was to make a payment in return for the monopoly, which was fixed at £20 sterling a year.³ This patent would have continued till 1665, but in 1661 a monopoly for twelve years was granted for the manufacture of 'Castle Soap.'⁴

¹ *A Short and True Relation Concerning the Soap Business.* London, 1641, *passim*.

² Chambers's *Domestic Annals of Scotland*, i. p. 510. *Leith and its Antiquities*, by James Campbell Irons, ii. pp. 141, 142.

³ *Ibid.*, ii. pp. 80, 81.

⁴ *Acts of the Parliaments of Scotland*, vii. p. 47.

After the Restoration the attention of the legislature was directed towards soap, and in 1661 an excise of £6 Scots was imposed on each barrel imported; at the same time, all materials required by the home producer (such as oil, potash) were admitted free of duty, while soap made within the country was exempted from taxes for nineteen years.¹ As in the case of sugar, when soap was exported two ounce of bullion were to be brought to the mint for every six barrels shipped.² By a subsequent act of 1669 the same condition was applied to importation.³

Under the encouragement of these acts, which amounted almost to the exclusion of foreign soap, an influential company was formed in 1667, with its headquarters at Glasgow, for whale-fishing and soap-boiling. There were originally nine partners, who subscribed £1300 sterling each, making the capital of the undertaking £11,700 sterling. At first the chief efforts of the company were directed towards whale fishing and foreign trade to Greenland and the extreme north of America and Russia. A large ship (for that time) of 700 tons burden, and carrying forty guns, was built at Belfast and named the 'Lyon.' Soon afterwards three or four other ships were built and dispatched. The company was successful in catching whales, and the blubber was boiled down at Greenock in extensive premises known as the 'Royal Close.' This was only the first stage in the process of soap-making, for the main works, known as the 'Soaperie,' were situated in Glasgow at the head of the Candleriggs. These premises were built on the site now occupied by Nos. 108-120 Candleriggs and Nos. 12-16 Canon Street, and consisted of a large square surrounded by houses for the managers, stores, sheds, and cellars.⁴

This company, like so many of its predecessors, soon found that whale-fishing was a disappointing speculation, and the voyages became gradually less frequent. After some of the ships had been lost this part of the former operations of the company was abandoned, and in 1695 the Committee of Trade was prepared to grant privileges for seven or ten voyages to any who would adventure.⁵ The Glasgow company, though it had obtained in 1685 an act granting it the privileges of a manufacture, and also a recommendation to the tacksmen of the

¹ *Acts of Parliaments of Scotland*, vii. pp. 88, 89, 203.

² *Ibid.*, vii. p. 253.

³ *Ibid.*, vii. p. 560.

⁴ *Glasgow Past and Present*, pp. 873, 874.

⁵ *Parliamentary Papers*, circa 1695: 'List of Acts to be desired.'

Customs that there should be no abatement of the duties on whalebone and soap,¹ does not appear to have responded to this invitation. The renewal of this part of the enterprise fell to others. Sir John Shaw, of Greenock, obtained an act granting the privileges of a manufacture to a company he had formed 'with a considerable stock,' to carry on the fishing industry,² and one of the many enterprises undertaken by Robert Douglas, of Leith, was whale-fishing, in which he was 'at vast expenses and great loss.'³ According to M'Ure all the capital invested by the Glasgow Greenland Fishing and Soap Company in the former undertaking was lost.⁴

The 'Soaperie,' freed from the incubus of unfortunate whaling voyages, was successful. Whether it remained in the hands of the original company or was sold to a new one does not appear. In 1700 the manufacture of soap was mentioned as one of the Scottish industries which was firmly established.⁵ In 1715 the manager advertised in the *Glasgow Courant* that he was prepared to sell good black or speckled soaps at the Soaperie at reasonable rates.⁶ The company appears to have continued a quiet, unenterprising career till the beginning of the last quarter of the eighteenth century. 'Senex,' who visited the works not long before the concern was wound up, wrote that 'there appeared to be only about half a dozen men employed, and these were *clamping* about the floor in a very inactive manner, having heavy iron shoes on their feet. It was easy to see that they were working at days' wages.'⁷ In 1777 the buildings were partly consumed by a fire,⁸ and in 1785 the whole ground buildings and utensils were advertised to be sold by public roup.⁹

¹ *Acts of the Parliaments of Scotland*, viii. p. 490.

² *Ibid.*, x. p. 80.

³ *Parliamentary Papers*, 1703: 'The Petition of Robert Douglas, elder and younger, Soap Boilers in Leith.'

⁴ *Glasgow Past and Present*, p. 872.

⁵ MS. Discourses anent Improvements may be made in Scotland—Advocates' Library, 33, 5, 16, f. 15.

⁶ *Glasgow Past and Present*, p. 874.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Annals of Glasgow*, by James Cleland. Glasgow, 1816, ii. p. 367.

⁹ *Glasgow Mercury*, August 15, 1785, in *Glasgow Past and Present*, p. 874.

THE SUGAR-REFINING AND RUM-DISTILLING
COMPANIES AT GLASGOW.

The Wester Sugar Works (1667).
The Easter Sugar Works (1669).
The South Sugar Works (1696).
The King Street Sugar Works (1700).

The refining of sugar had been started at Glasgow during the Protectorate of Cromwell, or not long after the Restoration.¹ At first the profits were very large, and, according to Gibson, it was in this industry that the first fortunes in business were acquired in the West of Scotland.² It was not long before the Government availed itself of the opportunity of raising revenue from the production of a new taxable commodity, for in 1661 an act was passed requiring that 2 oz. of bullion should be brought to the mint for every 60 lbs. of sugar exported.³ In 1669 this act was modified to the extent of imposing a duty of 6 oz. of bullion to be brought to the mint for every cwt. of loaf sugar exported.⁴ The design of this legislation was to secure that at least part of the proceeds of sales made abroad should be brought back in bullion, and that some of this would be handed over to the State to be used as coinage.

After the passing of the acts of 1661 a partnership was formed in the year 1667, consisting originally of four persons. 'At first the proprietors got a little apartment for boiling sugar—a Dutchman being master-boiler—this undertaking proved very effectual and their endeavours wonderfully successful, so that they left their little apartment and built a great stone tenement with convenient office-houses for their work, within a great court, with a pleasant garden belonging thereto.'⁵ This building, known as the Wester Sugar House, stood at the corner of Candleriggs and Bell's Wynd.⁶

About two years afterwards (*i.e.* in 1669) another partnership for sugar-refining was established by five partners. This

¹ *The History of Glasgow*, by James Gibson, Glasgow, 1777, p. 246.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Acts of the Parliaments of Scotland*, vii. p. 254.

⁴ *Ibid.*, vii. p. 560.

⁵ *A View of the City of Glasgow*, by John M'Ure, Glasgow, 1736, p. 282.

⁶ *Old Glasgow*, by Andrew MacGeorge, Glasgow, 1880, p. 155.

was also successful, and, according to M'Ure, the Joint Stock employed 'wonderfully increased.'¹ In 1684 the capital employed in one of these undertakings amounted to £10,000 sterling.² The buildings afterwards erected for the refinery, founded in 1669, were known as the Easter Sugar Work. An illustration of the building, which was remarkable for its great height (considering the date when it was built), is given in *Glasghu Facies*.³ On the passing of the act of 1681 for the encouragement of trade and manufactures, the partners of both these works presented a joint petition to Parliament asking that the privileges offered by the act should be extended to their undertakings. They stated in support of their request that they were in a position to sell sugar at one-third of the price at which it had been imported, and on this and other grounds both Sugar Houses obtained the privilege of a manufacture for nineteen years from 1681.⁴

Soon afterwards an event happened which threatened the success of the Wester undertaking, and which at the same time shows a peculiar risk to which these very small companies or large partnerships were subject. Peter Gemmill, one of the four original partners, had died, leaving his share in the concern to his wife. She was unable to take part in the management 'as partners should and do, because it requires great skill and pains.' She also refused, according to the complaint presented to the Privy Council by the other partners, to contribute her share, or to reckon according to the contract signed by all the partners. As a result the works were absolutely at a stand, the stock of materials was wasting, and the servants idle—the latter meaning a loss of £16 sterling per month. The other partners prayed the Privy Council to settle the value of the widow's share, and they would buy her out. In the end, however, the magistrates of Glasgow were directed 'to compose the dispute,' and there is no further information as to whether the share in question was transferred, or whether the female partner became reconciled to the 'great pains' of business.⁵ If any conclusion can be drawn from the state of the

¹ *A View of Glasgow*, *ut supra*, p. 282.

² Collection of Petitions to the Barons of the Exchequer (Edinburgh University Library). "Petition of the Masters of the Sugarie Works at Glasgow."

³ p. 543.

⁴ *Acts of the Parliaments of Scotland*, viii. p. 360.

⁵ *Acts of the Privy Council of Scotland*, 1682-1685, ff. 187, 188.

partnership when M'Ure wrote his *View of Glasgow*, it would appear that though many of these West of Scotland partnerships at any given time were confined to a few persons, the interest was not long retained in one family, for in this particular case, in M'Ure's time, there were six partners, and none of the six had the same name as any of the original four.¹

Probably one reason for the continued success of these sugar works was that the refining industry was supplemented by the production of rum. The rum was sold to great advantage in the colonies, and a considerable amount of it was consumed at home. This branch of the industry, however, met with some hindrances from various sources. Owing to the system of leasing the collection of taxes to private individuals, the tacksmen of the Customs did not obey the different acts of Parliament designed to encourage home industries. In fact, as a contemporary writer expressed it, 'they do not regard the laws but their own profit, *per fas et nefas*.'² In the sugar industry, for instance, though exemption from Customs had been granted by the act in favour of the Wester and Easter Works in 1681, a few years later the tacksmen at Edinburgh seized a quantity of rum consigned for export by the proprietors of these works.³ The case was debated before the Exchequer in April, 1684, and the claim to exemption from duties was allowed.⁴ The matter did not rest at this stage, for a counter petition was presented declaring that the trade in rum should be suppressed, as this drink was injurious to the health of the lieges.⁵ Though this attack on the making of rum failed for the time, it eventually produced a temporary result, for in 1695 an act of Parliament was passed prohibiting both the making and sale of rum, except for export, on the grounds that it hindered the sale of strong waters made of malt, and also that 'being a drug rather than a liquor,' the consumption of it was prejudicial to health.⁶ This act was repeated soon afterwards. As against this short-lived repressive legislation is to be counted the imposition of a duty⁷ of

¹ *Glasghu Facies—Glasgow Ancient and Modern*, p. 871.

² *A Letter to a Member of Parliament*, Edinburgh, 1700, p. 13.

³ Bundle of Petitions to the Barons of the Exchequer (Edinburgh University Library). Petition of the Master of the Sugarie Works at Glasgow.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, Petition relating to the Sugarie Works, Glasgow.

⁶ *Acts of the Parliaments of Scotland*, ix. p. 462.

⁷ *Ibid.*, x. p. 34.

£6 Scots per cwt. on imported sugar candy. The Royal Burghs too had an intention of supporting the industry, but if any steps were taken there is no record of their nature.¹

On the settlement of domestic affairs in Scotland after the Revolution, when a serious effort was being made to develop home manufactures, it was to be expected that one of the first enterprises that would attract the capitalist would be that which was officially declared to have been 'a most profitable one.'² In 1695 Robert Douglas, of Leith, who was at the same time promoting works for the manufacture of soap, earthenware, china, and starch, was granted the 'privilege of a manufacture' for the usual term of nineteen years, not only for the diverse undertakings already mentioned, but also for sugar works from which he was entitled to export rum to the amount of 18 tuns yearly.³ In spite of this attempt to settle the industry at Leith the seat of trade remained at Glasgow. In 1696 an act was passed in favour of Robert and James Montgomery (who had at least one other partner associated with them), which stated that owing to the success of the industry the number of works should be increased. Accordingly the same privileges already granted to the other undertakings were conferred upon this one under the title of the 'New Sugar Manufactory at Glasgow.'⁴ Following the custom of the existing partnerships, this undertaking adopted a local designation, and its works became known as the 'South Sugar House.' It was described by M^cUre as situated on the west side of Stockwell Street, and consisting of a large court, surrounded by high and low apartments, with cellars, a store house, boiling houses with distilling apartments, pleasant gardens, and all conveniences whatsoever.⁵

There were now West, East, and South Sugar Houses, and it might be expected that the next to be founded would be the Northern Sugar House. As a matter of fact there were works under this title which were situated close to the Wester House, and appear ultimately to have been absorbed by the older undertaking.⁶ The Northern concern, however, was founded later, and the fourth Sugar House, known as that

¹ *Records of the Convention of the Royal Burghs, 1677-1711*, p. 95.

² *Acts of the Parliaments of Scotland*, x. p. 66.

³ *Ibid.*, ix. p. 491.

⁴ *Ibid.*, x. p. 66.

⁵ *A View of the City of Glasgow*, p. 283.

⁶ *Glasgow Past and Present*, *ut supra*, p. 871.

at King Street, was granted the privilege of becoming a statutory undertaking in 1700.¹ The act is in favour of Matthew and David Campbell, but soon afterwards the partners were six in number. In fact, during the first half of the eighteenth century, these and other co-partneries consisted of from five to ten of 'our high-class citizens, such as our Provost, Baillies, and Deans of Guild, with a "Sir John" or a "Sir George" scattered here and there among them.'² It is related that there was much consternation in Glasgow when, in 1736, the six partners in the Easter Sugar Work, comprising the Provost, two Bailies, the Treasurer of the City, and a goldsmith were bought out by a new and unknown co-partnery called 'Robert M'Nair, Jean Holmes and Co.' The title of the purchasing 'Co.' was in reality a somewhat ponderous joke. M'Nair was a 'new man' who had acquired considerable wealth, and finding that all undertakings of magnitude were in the hands of co-partnerships, he, as a satire on the prevalent custom, registered his own firm in his own name and that of his wife, thereby forming literally 'a one man' company.³

The Glasgow Sugar Houses constitute an exception to the general rule that few industrial companies founded in the seventeenth century survived the removal of protection after the Union. This fact is the more interesting, since the sugar trade had fewer privileges than the cloth, linen, or paper companies. It had been founded before the act of 1681, and there was never a complete prohibition of competitive products.⁴ Even the exemption from duties ceased in 1715, for in that year the Crown sued the Leith refiners for £40,000 sterling of 'bye-gone' duties. Eventually a compromise was effected by which the claim by the Crown was remitted on condition that the refiners would surrender their rights to exemption from duties under their private acts.

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¹ *Acts of the Parliaments of Scotland*, x. p. 212.

² *Glasgow Past and Present*, p. 440.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 438-440.

⁴ As to the differences between the acts of 1661 and 1681, *vide* Article, January, 1904.