

CHAPTER IV.—VISITATIONS AND EXAMINATIONS OF SCHOOLS.

§ 1. ECCLESIASTICAL VISITATIONS.—§ 2. PARLIAMENTARY VISITATIONS.—§ 3. MUNICIPAL VISITATIONS.

THE most important event in the little history of the school was the 'Visitation,' which was attended with much pomp and solemnity, and was a subject of painful anxiety and careful preparation, on the part of masters and scholars alike. On that awful day the Visitors, who generally included some representatives of the civic and ecclesiastical authorities, and sometimes, as in Aberdeen, Edinburgh, and Glasgow, the academic element, subjected the masters and scholars to a rigorous examination, in regard to discipline, doctrine, qualifications and proficiency. These visitations, sometimes made by the church and parliament as well as by the managers, were of incalculable value, in promoting rivalry among the scholars, discipline in the school, and a sense of responsibility in the masters. In fact, visitation was the most salutary plan that could be devised for the government of schools, and without it there were no means of ascertaining their efficiency. We give several entries from the records, illustrating this important subject, beginning with the ecclesiastical visitations, of which there are notices as old as the Reformation.

§ 1. The Book of Discipline, written in 1560, proposes that discreet, learned, and grave men shall visit quarterly all schools for trying the progress of scholars in learning.¹ An Act of Assembly, dated 1567, ordains visitors to try masters and doctors with regard to 'soundness' in religion, ability in teaching, and honesty in conversation.² In 1578, the

¹ Works of Knox, ii., 209 (Laing's ed.).

² Referred to in Acts of Assembly passed on 17th and 18th December 1638.

Kirk passed an order for visiting schools;¹ and in 1595, the Assembly ordain every presbytery, within their own bounds, to visit and reform grammar schools in towns and deal with magistrates for appointing 'most meet persons' to assist the masters in discipline.² In 1642, the Assembly appointed a committee to consider the time and manner of visiting schools, and the 'best and most compendious and orderly course' for teaching grammar;³ and in 1645 the Assembly, with the view of advancing learning and good order in grammar schools, enacted that every such school should be visited twice in the year by visitors appointed by the presbytery and kirk session in landward parishes, by the town council and ministers in burghs, and by the universities, where there are any, always with consent of the patrons of the school, in order that the diligence of masters and the proficiency of scholars may be ascertained, and deficiency censured.⁴ The Act passed in 1645 is re-enacted in 1706, when the Assembly enjoin presbyteries to visit all the public grammar schools, at least twice every year, and order synods to inquire at their privy censures whether this recommendation has been obeyed.⁵

A single extract from the church records may be quoted to show the painstaking care with which the presbyteries assisted in conducting these examinations: on 8th January 1735, the provost of Peebles, in name of the town council, applies to the presbytery for a visitation of the grammar school; the presbytery appoint a committee to visit it on 4th February next, and to report at the next diet of the presbytery, to be held on the day immediately after the examination. Accordingly on 5th February 1735, the brethren having called for the report, the committee stated that they had met yesterday in the school, accompanied by the magistrates and several heritors of the parish; and having caused the schoolmaster to examine the Latin classes severally, they heard each class read and explain parts of the authors used; examined some in different places; tried them upon the parts

¹ Booke of the Universall Kirke, p. 415.

² Ibid., p. 856.

³ Acts of the General Assembly.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

of speech and syntax; likewise prescribed a theme and examined it; having thus got a sufficient specimen of the master's sufficiency and method of teaching, and of the proficiency of the scholars, they unanimously approved of both, and having also heard the other classes of the school examined upon English and arithmetic, they were very well satisfied with them all. The presbytery having 'heard, read, and considered' the report, unanimously approve of the whole, and appoint Mr John Hay, minister at Peebles, to acquaint the magistrates of the same, recommending them to procure, if they can, a more convenient schoolhouse; on 2d April, Mr Hay reports that he delivered the presbytery's commission to the magistrates who promise to provide a more convenient schoolhouse as soon as possible.¹

§ 2. Visitations of schools were also appointed to be made on the high authority of parliament. The Parliament of the Commonwealth instructs the Council in Scotland to visit and reform schools, and suspend statutes or customs which are not agreeable to the good of the people, and are inconsistent with the government.² This Act was conceived in the interest of Cromwell's government more than in that of the schools of Scotland, but a more national Act was passed shortly after the Revolution, when a large body of commissioners was appointed in 1690 to visit schools, providing them with pious and qualified masters, and removing such as shall be found erroneous, scandalous, negligent, insufficient, or disaffected, or who do not subscribe the Confession of Faith; the visitors also to take order with regard to the revenues of the school and set down rules for their management.³ Shortly before the Union we find that an act and commission were read in Parliament for visiting schools;⁴ but it does not appear to have become law—the times being, perhaps, too stormy for passing Education Acts.

¹ Presbytery Records of Peebles. For other examples of presbyterial visitations, see *supra*, Chap. I., § 6.

² Acts of Parliament, 1655, 1658, vi., Part ii., 826, 876.

³ *Ibid.*, 1690, c. 25, ix., 163.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1704 and 1705, xi., 152, 235.

§ 3. Leaving the records of the church and parliament, we come to visitations made by the town councils, the patrons of the school, which are more instructive for the purpose of this work. Our first extract, of date before the end of the sixteenth century, is of great interest, from the minute picture it gives of the mode and extent of the examination of the burgh schools of Glasgow. In a course of study prescribed for the scholars of the grammar school of that city, it is provided that the school shall be twice a year examined by men of eminence and learning, appointed by the council of the burgh and of the university—namely, on the Tuesdays preceding the first days of May and November. The master—‘scholarchas’—shall remind the town council and the dean of the faculty of arts of the fact twenty days previously, in order to the providing of censors and examiners, and warn the scholars publicly, so that they may diligently prepare for the approaching trial. The scholars in each class shall be examined ‘pro artibus delegatorum;’ in the two higher classes themes in the vulgar tongue shall be dictated, which the scholars shall render into Latin, handing their exercises to the examiners. When the examination is finished, the pupils of the several classes shall publicly appear in the place and rank gained by each, when the less proficient shall be reproved, the unworthy put back and the rest advanced with more signal honours and rewards. On the day following the examination of the grammar school, the Scots schools—‘scholæ triviales vernaculæ’—shall be visited by the delegates, accompanied by the master of the grammar school, who shall note the nature of the instruction and the progress of the boys in learning, piety, and morals. At that diet intimation shall be made to those who are to study Latin that year, in order that, not later than the first day of June, they may be preferred to the Latin school; and thus be the better prepared to enter on the first year of their course.¹

The extracts which follow illustrate how common was the system of visitations or exhibitions in the burgh schools of

¹ From the Original in the archives of Glasgow.

Scotland from the end of the sixteenth century downwards. In many burghs the record only acquaints us with the fact of the visitation having been made, but in others we learn how masters and scholars were encouraged, abuses corrected, and reforms introduced. In 1601, the town council of Stirling appointed a day for 'taking ordour with the estait of the grammar school of the burgh,'¹ which was apparently not in a satisfactory condition. Three years later, the council of Aberdeen, for the better discipline of the grammar school, appointed a committee to visit it quarterly for taking trial of doctrine and discipline—the visitors taking advice of the bishop, ministers, and principal of the college;² in 1622, certain burghesses were chosen visitors of all the schools of the burgh—visiting them at least every month, and reporting where they find any disorder or violation of the rules, by masters or scholars.³ The earliest recorded visitation of the grammar school of Perth was made in 1630 for 'settling doun injunctions and admonitions' to the master and doctors who are charged with 'evil attendance.'⁴

There does not appear to have been a formal visitation of the high school of Edinburgh till 1640,⁵ when the council, considering that hitherto there has not been 'set down anie solid course for the tryell of the maister and doctors in teatching and attending of the scolleris concredit to thair care,' enacted that in future there shall be two yearly visitations—viz., on the last Monday of October and on the first Monday of May; in the week preceding, the classes shall be tried at two different diets by examiners appointed by the town council, who shall, at the first diet, examine the lower classes on the authors read and rules learned since the last examination;⁶ the

¹ Burgh Records of Stirling.

² Burgh Records of Aberdeen.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Burgh Records of Perth.

⁵ But as early as 1614 the town council ordained that there shall be two public examinations of the high school each year, the first in May and the other in October.

⁶ Every doctor was required to keep a minute of the authors read and the part of the grammar gone over since the last visitation.

examiners shall next prescribe a theme to such as can 'turn a theame,' which each of the scholars shall deliver to the examiners. At the second diet, the master shall produce, like the doctors, a note of the authors read since the last visitation by the high class, whereupon the examiners shall try such of them as they think meet, and prescribe a theme which each 'sall mak apairt by himself without the help of ane other, and thereafter write it over *in mundo* and deliver it to the examiners.' When the council 'have hard the hearing and the scolleris are dismissed,' the examiners shall report how the youth have profited in learning, after which they shall remove the master to see if anything can be found against him; the doctors shall next be removed for the same purpose, and the council shall remedy any defect which may be found.¹

Visitations of the grammar school of Paisley commenced in 1646, when in June of that year the council appointed the school to be visited by the bailies and ministers once a month,² and we have already seen that a visitation of the grammar school of Aberdeen was in 1622 ordained to be made as frequently—once a month. The record does not indicate the causes of the following visitations of the grammar schools of Peebles, Stirling, and Glasgow: In 1652 the council of Peebles ordain the school to be visited and the minister to be acquainted therewith;³ in 1653 the bailies of Stirling are requested to go 'alongis and take notice of the grammer scoole;'⁴ and in 1654 the council of Glasgow order all Scots schools to be visited.⁵ Two years later the council of Jedburgh order visitations of the school to be made on the first Wednesdays of November and May in order that the master and doctor shall be tried 'concerning the soundness of their judgment in matters of religion,' their ability as teachers,

¹ Burgh Records of Edinburgh.

² Burgh Records of Paisley. For many years the visitation continued to be made.

³ Burgh Records of Peebles.

⁴ Burgh Records of Stirling.

⁵ Burgh Records of Glasgow.

the honesty of their conversation, and the fidelity with which they discharge their calling, so that the proficiency of the scholars may be known.¹

An important record concerning visitation is preserved in the registers of Aberdeen, and is very valuable as showing the thoroughness with which it was conducted in the good old town more than two hundred years ago. On 15th June 1659, the town council, considering that the quarterly visitation of the grammar and music schools appointed by former acts, if rightly conducted, would promote the learning of the youth, approve the following regulations, together with the *leges scolæ*,² adopted in 1636: 1. There shall be four solemn visitations of the grammar school every year, one at the beginning of every quarter, when the scholars shall be tried in making themes, interpreting and analysing authors, and making verses—a work which shall take up one day, if rightly done. 2. The master of the grammar school shall keep a register of visitations, in which shall be written the 'laws of the school,' printed about the year 1636, and also the act of council approving these overtures; the scholar who at the quarterly visitation gains the premium shall, with his own hand, insert his name in the register, mentioning whether he gained it by making a theme or a verse or analysing authors; he shall also record the date of visitation, which must be done by *nonas, idus et calendas*, the master helping those of the lower classes to enter the date correctly; the prizeman's theme shall be affixed above his class till the next visitation. 3. Each scholar in the school shall have an antagonist, who as much as possible shall be his equal, with the view of stirring up emulation; neither to receive help in his trials. 4. The master shall keep the themes of the present visitation until the next quarterly visitation, that their proficiency may be marked. 5. They who make the best verse and the best theme shall have each a premium after it appears by examination to be their own making. 6. There

¹ Burgh Records of Jedburgh.

² We have not been able to find these 'laws,' which are probably lost.

shall be public acting at every quarterly visitation, that the scholars may learn boldness and a vivacity in public speaking. 7. When two or more are equal in making a theme, or in other point of trial, they may be put to an extempore trial for ascertaining the order of merit; the visitors must be careful not to discourage the unsuccessful competitor, who should receive a word of public commendation from the mouth of him who gives the premium to the victor, nor give a premium in a partial way, because that would bring visitations into contempt and frustrate their chief end; the visitors should therefore be careful to go about the duty seriously and not slightly, as the doing thereof in that way will tend greatly, through God's blessing, to the good of the school and scholars, and doubtless be a means of stirring up charitable hearts to mortify lands to pious uses for the increase of learning and virtue when they perceive that care is taken to fulfil the will of others who have mortified before them for such uses. 8. At every visitation, the act of council, approving or recommending these or other rules, shall be read at the quarterly visitations, for refreshing the memory of the visitors.¹ Nearly half a century later the council, seriously considering that fixed rules have not been drawn up for a long time for regulating the grammar school, ratify on 23d October 1700 the following laws: There shall be a solemn visitation yearly in the beginning of October when the several classes shall be examined and premiums given to the most deserving; the prizemen's names, and the subjects of the prizes, being entered in the school register. Besides this solemn visitation, there shall be three other visitations by deputies of the council, two ministers of the burgh, and two masters of Marischal College—the first visitation on the first Thursday of February, the second on the first Thursday of May, and the third on the first Thursday of August. Besides the four yearly visitations, two or more of the magistrates and council shall visit the school on the first Tuesday of every month, and inquire how the discipline of the school is observed.² In 1711 it was

¹ Burgh Records of Aberdeen.

² Ibid.

further enacted, that at every visitation the master shall provide two catalogues, containing the names of the scholars, the authors and grammar which they are learning, and what they have been taught since the last visitation; one catalogue to be kept by the town clerk and to be brought with the *leges scolæ*, the other to be lodged in the schools among the books.¹

Few visitations are so instructive as those of Aberdeen; but the mere fact of visitations being made at all in burghs of less note is worthy of being recorded as showing the interest taken even by small burghs in the proper government of their schools. We found that the grammar school of Perth was visited in 1630 for improving the discipline of the school, but from the next entry in the records on this subject, it would appear that the inspection was not again repeated till 1684, when the council, for the encouragement of the grammar school, revived the ancient custom of visiting it, and it is gratifying to know, found the scholars giving greater satisfaction than was expected.² For redressing the disorders in the common school of Stirling, the council in 1694 appoint it to be visited at the beginning of every quarter; the ministers to be advertised of the visitation, so that they may 'concur and go along' with the council.³ On 21st June 1704, the council of Montrose, considering how much the public schools of the burgh are decayed, appoint the magistrates to visit them twice a year, viz., on first Tuesdays of January and July, and to take order for their regulation; the ministers, and such councillors, or others, as the magistrates shall call, may accompany them.⁴ In 1706, for ascertaining the cause of the decay of the grammar school of Cupar, a visitation was ordered to be made.⁵ On 30th December 1707, a committee of the town council of Dundee visited the English school;⁶ and on 11th September 1749, another committee and the rector of the grammar school visited the same school, and found it better than they had expected; it is determined,

¹ Burgh Records of Aberdeen.

² Burgh Records of Stirling.

³ Burgh Records of Cupar.

⁴ Burgh Records of Perth.

⁵ Burgh Records of Montrose.

⁶ Burgh Records of Dundee.

however, to try again the proficiency of the boys at Lammas next.¹ On 23d August 1718, the council of Banff and the minister visited the grammar school, and found the master able to teach the literature requisite, and the scholars in a fair way of becoming proficient in humanity.² In 1728 the whole council of Stirling, and ministers of the Gospel, visited the grammar school, to 'inquire how the boys profit under their several teachers, and how they are taught.'³ In November 1735, the council of Ayr apply to the presbytery for a visitation of the school, which is accordingly made by a committee of that body, accompanied by the magistrates;⁴ in June 1766 the council order 'that the schools be visited and publickly examined annually on the second Thursday of June, and that the magistrates and dean of guild inspect on that day the publick library and mathematical instruments.'⁵ The town council of Kinghorn, in 1763, ordain that the grammar school 'shall be publickly examined by the master and doctor in August on the day before the vacation.'⁶ On 22d February 1777, the council of Banff, for advancing learning, appoint yearly visitations to be made of the grammar school, on first Tuesday of April, in order to test the proficiency of the scholars and the method of teaching, by two ministers named by the presbytery, along with the magistrates and minister of the place.⁷ On 26th February 1781, the council of Inverurie propose to visit the public school, and give orders to purchase premiums for encouraging the best scholars;⁸ on 3d April 1782, the magistrates petition the presbytery to visit the school; and the visitation took place on 24th April, an edict having been served on the proper parties on the 14th.⁹ In

¹ Burgh Records of Dundee.

² Burgh Records of Banff.

³ Burgh Records of Stirling. The office-bearers of Stirling were ordered, in 1763, to visit the public schools within the burgh.

⁴ Burgh Records of Ayr.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Burgh Records of Kinghorn.

⁷ Burgh Records of Banff.

⁸ Burgh Records of Inverurie. This entry occurs in the burgh accounts: 27th February, spent in John Sangster's house in visiting the public and very flourishing school under Mr Lessel, 7s. 6d.

⁹ Ibid.

1776 the bailies of Greenock agreed to postpone the public examination of the grammar school, on account of the bad health of the master, until after the vacation;¹ in 1777 the council desire the magistrates to arrange with the ministers and masters of the schools for a quarterly examination;² and in 1784 the council attended the examination of the mathematical school, along with a number of the inhabitants, and were perfectly satisfied with the progress.³

We have now reached the advertising period—a period when the authorities wish to make the result of the examinations patent to the world. Thus, in the *Glasgow Mercury*, of 20th September 1782, there is a flattering account of the examination of the Paisley grammar school, under Mr Henry, ‘a well qualified and assiduous preceptor;’⁴ and an equally flattering account of the examination of the grammar school appears in the *Glasgow Courier* of 20th September 1793. On 8th September 1783, the council of Crail, considering that on 29th August the grammar school was examined, and that the scholars have made great progress in the different branches, agree to approve of the same publicly by inserting it in the *Courant*, the magistrates signing the advertisement;⁵ the council resolved also to publish the gratifying result of the examination held 18th September 1786.⁶ In June 1784, the magistrates of Ayr attended the examination of the public schools, and had great reason to applaud the proficiency of the scholars, and ability and attention of the masters; they observed, however, with much regret, that there were few scholars at the mathematical school, who, upon examination seemed to have made little progress, owing to the want of authority in the master.⁷ In 1791 it was agreed that the Fortrose academy should be publicly examined twice a year by the presbytery in March or April, and by the whole visitors at a subsequent time;⁸ and a committee was appointed for visiting the school *weekly*, and

¹ Burgh Records of Greenock.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Glasgow Mercury.*

⁵ Burgh Records of Crail.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Burgh Records of Ayr.

⁸ Records of Fortrose academy.

to give in reports to the general meetings of visitors held quarterly.¹ The town council of Kilmarnock having applied to the presbytery in 1795 to examine the schools of the burgh, the grammar school and the English school were tried in presence of the magistrates and council, and it was found that the scholars 'gave the highest satisfaction.'² On 4th January 1814, a committee of the town council of Dumbarton was appointed to visit the grammar school when the children are convened, and to inquire into the progress of their education.³ The records of Aberdeen give the following account of the annual visitation of the grammar school in 1824: The rector dictated an English theme to be translated into Latin by the third, fourth, and fifth classes; the visitors then attended, for nearly two hours, the examination of the first and second classes, in both of which the scholars acquitted themselves with great ease and correctness, in translating Latin into English, and English sentences into Latin, as well as in answering questions connected with the syntax and grammar of the latter language. In the afternoon, the visitors again met to examine the Latin versions written by the three higher classes, and determine their order of merit. The performance of the versions was exceedingly creditable, not a few of them being free from errors, and many of them evincing a skill in the choice of words, and an acquaintance with the Latin idiom, which could not have been acquired without care and diligence on the part of the teachers.⁴

We gather from these extracts that the public schools in many of the burghs of Scotland were subjected to periodical examinations, more or less searching, from the middle of the sixteenth century downwards. The importance of these visitations and examinations cannot be over-estimated in stimulating the teachers, creating rivalry among the scholars,

¹ Records of Fortrose academy.

² Records of Presbytery of Kilmarnock. ³ Burgh Records of Dumbarton.

⁴ Burgh Records of Aberdeen. From October 1765 there is a record in the minutes of the council of the annual visitation, without intermission, until 1856, when it stops.

rousing indifferent pupils, certifying the progress of children, establishing public confidence in the school, suggesting improvements in the management, method of teaching, and organisation of the school, giving to the pupils an assurance or a confidence in themselves calculated to be of service to them in after-life, and, generally, in diffusing education—the higher education.¹ At present there is an annual exhibition or public examination of all our burgh schools, which usually takes place at the close of the session, when the work of the past year is gone over and reported on, the examination being conducted by the teachers, patrons, and others invited for the purpose. Schools in receipt of Government grants are professionally examined and reported on by her majesty's inspectors, and a few of the most important schools are occasionally examined at the request of the managers by persons unconnected with the institution—including professors of Scotch universities, scholars of English universities, members of the Scotch bar, distinguished teachers and clergymen, and other gentlemen connected with education. The advantage to the burgh schools of annual examinations, by *independent* examiners, has recently been admitted by all the best teachers in Scotland, and strongly recommended by so eminent authorities as the assistant commissioners appointed in 1867 to inquire into the state of the burgh schools. They recommended that the secondary schools should be examined annually, and

¹ These visitations invariably originated at the instance of the patrons; but there are instances of the reforms beginning from within—at the instance of the masters. Thus it was at the desire of the schoolmaster of Cupar, that the town council, in 1626, requested the presbytery to visit the grammar school: Burgh Records of Cupar. In September 1656, there is the first mention of a formal visitation of the burgh schools of Ayr, when the council, on the representation of the masters, appoint two councillors to visit at the end of every two months the grammar school, and to report its condition so as to prevent abuse: Burgh Records of Ayr; in 1784, William Neill, master of the English school, petitions to have his school examined once a quarter; the magistrates agree to quarterly examinations—the grammar school of Glasgow having adopted a similar system: *Ibid.*

publicly reported on—an arrangement which they believe would do as much to improve the quality of middle-class education as Government inspection has done to improve the elementary education in schools connected with the Privy Council.¹ Accordingly, the Education Act provides that every higher class school shall, with reference to the higher branches of knowledge, be annually examined, by persons appointed for that purpose by the school board; in fixing the periods of examination, regard shall be had to the reasonable wishes of the teachers. The expenses incident to these examinations may be paid out of the school fund.²

We conclude this part of our subject, by referring to the litigation, of a somewhat singular description, which the Education Act has given rise to, in connection with visitations. The school board of Kelso resolved—we think with more zeal than wisdom—to visit the schools under their charge, at irregular intervals, without giving previous intimation of their intention. The teacher of the public school of Kelso objected, however, to such visitations being made to his school, and, on 13th March 1874, refused to admit two members of the board deputed to that effect. In these circumstances, the school board prayed for an interdict against him, for refusing to admit them into the schoolroom, so often as they deem necessary, in the discharge of their duties; but it was refused, by a majority of the First Division of the Court of Session, on the ground that the right claimed was not clear on the face of the Education Act, which did not authorise a school board to make visits of surprise, or to interfere with a schoolmaster appointed to a public school, before the passing of that Act, otherwise than directed by that Act. On the other hand, one of the judges was of opinion that the school board, having the duty committed to them of keeping efficient the school, are in the discharge of their duty in visiting it, and that the excluding of the members by the teacher was illegal.³ Though, in the

¹ Education Report (1868), i., pp. xviii. and 138.

² 35 and 36 Vict., c. 62, § 62 (sub-sect. 6).

³ Session Cases (fourth series), ii., 228.

opinion of a majority of the judges, the school boards are not entitled to send any of their members at any time, and without notice, for the purpose of inspecting the school, that power is lodged in her majesty's inspectors by the Education Act, which provides that every public school, and every school in receipt of parliamentary grant, must be open at all times to any of them; and it will be no longer necessary to give notice of the time of the inspector's visit, unless it is otherwise provided in the code.¹

¹ 35 and 36 Vict., c. 62, §§ 60, 66.