

THE HIGH STREET

NEW LIGHTS  
ON  
OLD EDINBURGH

By JOHN REID



EDINBURGH  
DAVID DOUGLAS, 10 CASTLE STREET  
1894

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# NEW LIGHTS ON OLD EDINBURGH

## INTRODUCTION

So many eminent and accomplished writers have, one time or another, dealt with the varied historic aspects of Old Edinburgh, that the latter-day chronicler may well feel a certain amount of diffidence in offering his humbler wares to the public on such a classic theme. But the annals of the gray old capital are not easily exhausted, and the painstaking and careful gleaner need not wholly despair of adding his "daimen icker" to the "thrive," if he sets about the task in true workmanship fashion.

In a city where almost every square foot of ground is saturated with historical incident, where the heart-throb of Scotland has so long pulsed through its narrow streets, closes, and wynds, there is necessarily much to expatiate upon, and much that even the most conscientious and hard-working literary collector has had to leave untouched. Round the chequered reign of Queen Mary nearly all the romance of our Scottish history circles. There were

so many fascinating details of questionable intrigue, quasi chivalry, and rude greatness interwoven with her brief and strangely eventful life, that it is no wonder the bulk of the writers have made it the dominant note of their literary efforts for the last three hundred years. Consequently, the Old Edinburgh of the past historian is, to a large extent, the Edinburgh of Mary and her Court. What other interest their narratives have for us is coloured to a great extent by the rise and progress of the Reformation, and the melancholy fate of those who considered it their duty to offer themselves in sacrifice for the sake of their religious opinions.

It is held as a supportable tenet that what is remote is essentially more engrossing than what lies within the horizon of our own day. No doubt, to some extent it is true that the stirring and stormy times, when men held their lives in hourly jeopardy, have a far-off magnificence which those quiet epochs given up to peaceful trading and social accord do not possess for the majority of us. Yet the romance of life is surely not wholly destroyed by the absence of war; and in the Edinburgh of the eighteenth century, which has never yet received adequate treatment, but is entirely deserving of it, there is certainly much of surpassing interest. It is in some measure to supply this historical hiatus that the present unpretentious volume is offered to the public.

Every year fresh details come to light regarding the manners and customs of our grandfathers. Many

of these are of the most quaint and interesting kind, and well worth preserving in a more or less permanent form. Last century, it may be truly said, witnessed Scotland's high-water mark in literature. It had produced Robert Burns, and was training the great author of *Waverley* for the mighty work which was to carry the name of Scotland to the uttermost corners of the civilised world,—an era necessarily remarkable in the highest and best sense, and one which must ever remain memorable in our national history. Nevertheless, strange though it may seem, the chronicler has been culpably silent in regard to it.

While the present work does not pretend to confine itself exclusively to the affairs of last century, there will be found in its pages a vast deal of hitherto unpublished matter bearing thereon, gathered from a variety of sources, and verified by many documents put at the writer's disposal by private citizens and also by the aid of public papers relating to the civic and social life of the period. Many of the records consulted have lain unnoticed until quite recently, their interest and value never having been suspected.

If it were necessary to find anything like an excuse for the present work, it could readily be found in the fact that a large portion of the territory more immediately dealt with has been scheduled under the recent Improvement Scheme, so that there is a near probability that many of the wynds and

closes described will, at no distant date, cease to be recognisable as landmarks, and be utterly useless for the purpose of authentic research. These the writer has done his best to fix in something like a permanent record, ere the modern builder shall come with his desecrating art and sweep them for ever from our ken.

Although one would naturally imagine that charters, title-deeds of property, and transfer documents are not the liveliest sort of materials out of which to construct a readable volume, there is, nevertheless, quite a wealth of engrossing information in these mouldy old documents, which cannot fail to be of surpassing interest to the reader that values at its true worth the unique records of perhaps the most picturesque historical city of the kingdom. Even so dry-as-dust a receptacle as the Burgh Register of Sasines, with its quaint phraseology and curious methods of stating things, has yielded many titbits of old-world times, which will be gratifying to those who love to trace sequentially our onward progress from the silent, half-forgotten past to the teeming and noisy present.

The Scottish capital was in close touch with the national life of the country during the eighteenth century, and some vivid glimpses are given of the prevailing feelings of the nation during the time of the Union, as well as various lighter aspects of the rebellions of 1715 and of 1745, which have hitherto escaped the notice of the industrious scribe.

Long and arduous labour has been necessary to collate and verify the facts, the whole of which may be relied on as giving a faithful picture of the various periods dealt with. There has been no attempt made at embellishment, and the hope is entertained that what the book is thought to lack of sensationalism is atoned for by its general accuracy and veracity. When it has been deemed necessary, for the sake of greater completeness, to introduce incidents already partially familiar, they have been freshened up and brought down to date by the addition of much original matter, so that the whole may practically be said to be an entirely new handling of the subject.

The preliminary investigations for the purpose of compiling *New Lights on Old Edinburgh* have occupied some years, and no pains have been spared to make its every page an authentic record; and the more effectually to secure absolute accuracy, the writer has submitted his work to the scrutiny of several gentlemen whose knowledge of the subject is of the most intimate and reliable kind.

## EDINBURGH AFTER THE UNION

Old Edinburgh nomenclature—Amusing prediction as to the effect of the Treaty of Union—"Part of Britain formerly called Scotland"—Corporation view of the Union—Town Council's instructions to their Member of Parliament—Effect of removal of Court to London—The "bitter cry" of Scotland heard in Parliament Close—Illustrations from unpublished documents—Edinburgh Corporation desire "legal dissolution of the Union"—Admiral of the Firth of Forth and the Civil War scare—Town Council place their "lives and fortunes" at the disposal of the King—Their poetic Address to royalty—Curious petitions for compensation—Lord Provost Stewart and the baker—A pauper baronet.

NOTWITHSTANDING evidence of painstaking research, it can as little be said that the numerous published works on Edinburgh have left nothing unwritten about its antiquities as that full justice has been done to Scottish history. Careful examination of ancient archives, apart from the fact that the documents are only decipherable by experts in handwriting, necessitates continuous investigation throughout successive generations. Naturally, each writer takes up a field where there is a chance of

finding something new, and in the end the whole comes to be consolidated.

An enthusiast once remarked that there was nothing more fascinating than title-deeds, and even supposing there are limits to antiquarian bliss it is really surprising how much curious information may be gathered from a perusal of several thousands of these musty documents. Under their designations of three or four centuries ago, most of the well-known Edinburgh closes of to-day are unrecognisable, and to modern ears the names of the people themselves appear strange and even barbarous. The wealthy burgess who lived in the "foreland" or in the "great mansion," generally contrived to identify the neighbourhood with himself, so that the name of the closes changed with the times. This probably constitutes one of the greatest difficulties encountered in antiquarian research; and the inquirer turns gratefully to the description of the boundaries, and the names of the adjoining proprietors and tenants for a clue towards localising the great ones of the city. Indeed, careful study of these would almost enable an adept to prepare the plan of an entire close, and people the houses with its ancient inhabitants.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Old Edinburgh of four centuries ago was confined within such narrow limits that the notaries, "in presence of prudent men" as the witnesses were called, sometimes deemed it unnecessary to localise property with such minuteness as would have been serviceable in after days. So far as they were concerned the houses were simply on the north or the south side of "the king's highway," "the High Street," or perhaps



For the writer of historical novels the quaint names of the period are both useful and suggestive, especially those illustrative of the originality and humour of the Scottish people. There is quite a smack of *Waverley* about such mouthfuls as the Laird of Stottancleuch, or the Laird of Innernochtye, or of Trochrig, or Wyliecleuch.<sup>1</sup> For novelties in nomenclature, a desideratum nowadays, there is a rich mine in the archives of the past. Keeping out of account the eccentricity of "Jock Johnston, gentleman," we find that boys had names such as Judeano, Barthilmo, Egidia, *alias* Geilles, Eustachius, and Eekie, while more than one girl was christened Theodorite and Bethia.<sup>2</sup> Robert Henryson, the Scottish poet, had seemingly very ardent admirers in the beginning of the sixteenth century, for shortly after his *Testiment of Fair Cresseid* was published, a worthy burghess figured in Edinburgh society as Troilus Lawson. If one took the trouble to inquire into the genealogy of Troilus it would probably be found that he was a son of Lawson the Provost of these days.

even "the Street"; the particular neighbourhood being "opposite the Market Cross" or the Salt or Butter Trones; "near the Overbow" (West Bow), "under the Castle Wall" (as the first wall that surrounded Edinburgh was frequently named), "in the Buithraw" (the shops ranged against the sides of St. Giles), and "near the Netherbow" (top of St. Mary Street). "The High Street of the Cowgate" and a number of closes were also specifically named.

<sup>1</sup> Privy Council Records.

<sup>2</sup> Burgh Register of Sasines.

In the lists of the provosts, bailies, and aldermen of Edinburgh, some very curious surnames occur, and seem at first sight to have been importations from England, but a little investigation shows that they were quite common in the Scottish metropolis four or five centuries ago. When Edinburgh was surrendered to the Scots in the middle of the tenth century many of the people must have been of Saxon origin, which accounts for the numerous Saxon names at that early period. And then, too, Edinburgh was, from all accounts, the seat of Government of the Saxons. Very little information, however, is to be had on that point, and, notwithstanding England's lengthened possession of Scotland, the little that is known about early Edinburgh history is derived, not from English, but chiefly from Scottish writers.<sup>1</sup>

Although a great deal has been written about early Edinburgh we have still, so far as its social condition is concerned, much to learn about the eighteenth century. This period embraces events of deep interest to Scotsmen—the Union and the two rebellions. Upon these topics, and also upon the general state of society very amusing information may be gleaned from the recently-discovered papers belonging to the Corporation and to the Convention of Royal Burghs.<sup>2</sup> All the public business, whether

<sup>1</sup> Appendix A.

<sup>2</sup> For several centuries an overwhelming mass of manuscripts and printed matter has been accumulating in the city archives, until latterly, if they were not to be utterly lost, their arrangement, although apparently a hopeless task, became an impera-

local or national, was, as everybody is aware, transacted either in St. Giles', Parliament House, or the  
tive duty. This work, systematically undertaken for several years, is now completed, the whole of the documents having been inventoried for future reference. Probably a rearrangement and classification of the papers ought next to be undertaken, for they have been merely tied up, as they were found, in heterogeneous packets and bundles. But even in this form they are thoroughly accessible, which before they were not. Some idea of the magnitude of the work of arrangement may be gathered from the fact that not only were the documents tied in bundles, but the bundles were in sacks, the sacks were counted by dozens, and the whole comprised many cartloads. The work was begun the second week of January 1891, and at first the specialists were engaged revising and checking the inventory, formerly compiled by Mr. David Moyses, relating to a section of the papers. Many of these papers were found to be awaiting, but some of them turned up in the course of investigation, having simply got out of their place. Others are still awaiting, and it is feared have found their way into private custody. Moyses made many blunders, particularly about dates, and these had to be rectified. In such a mass of documents there was found, of course, a great quantity of rubbish, but genuine ore was occasionally picked out of the refuse. No fewer than thirty sacks of what are termed bailie court processes, protests, etc., were examined, and, so far as practicable, arranged according to their dates. There were also nearly 300 bundles of papers, roughly inventoried by Mr. Moyses, examined and checked. These alone contained between 6000 and 7000 separate documents. Buried amongst old processes in one of the sacks was an old chartulary of the burgh. There was also a series of interesting convention papers dating back from the time of the Union. In connection with these it is curious to note that in 1708 David Simpson, library keeper to Her Majesty at Holyrood House, petitioned the Convention for access to the writs and muniments of the Burghs in order "to clear their antiquities"; and also for appointment as "chronologer of the Burghs." At the annual sittings of the

Tolbooth ;<sup>1</sup> so that this quarter of Auld Reekie was in touch with every department of Scottish national life. This state of affairs did not terminate with the Union, the connecting link with every corner of Scotland being supplied by the Court or Parliament of the Four Burghs—familiarily known as the Convention—which from that time onward met in Edinburgh, and legislated on everything affecting trade.

In the light of subsequent events it is curious to learn that “loyal and religious hearts” in the Scottish Parliament were warned that the Union would cause us “to lose the light of the gospel,” and “burden us with the superstitions and idolatries of England,” which would “impose upon us its base and corrupt manners with its merchandise. All things imaginable, yea, the worst of evils are Convention this year it was resolved to have these papers carefully examined and reported upon. Many of them fill blanks in the extracts from the records already published under the editorship of Sir James Marwick ; others deal with new matters. The entire collection of records and documents is of much value, and worthy of a better repository than it now occupies. The papers are rich in material for illustrating the civic history, especially in minor details of commerce, taxation, valuation, etc., during the last four centuries. The personal writs, which are very numerous, are of importance mainly with regard to family history and genealogy, and many are doubtless the original warrants of those recorded in the Burgh Register of Deeds. The examination of the papers was entrusted to the Rev. W. M’Leod, of the Historical Department of the Register House, whose name is a guarantee that the work has been well done.

<sup>1</sup> Privy Council Records: introduction to vol. xi. p. xxviii.

practicable against us by the Parliament of Britain, where we shall be but 62 to 500 or 600. Our name shall be extinct as a nation, and, like the Jews, we shall be vagabonds over the whole earth.”<sup>1</sup> In 1709 the Earl of Wemyss facetiously described himself as “vice-admiral of that part of Britain formerly called Scotland.”<sup>2</sup> The Union was not at first unpopular with the Corporation. Whether they were influenced by visions of London deputations, it is impossible to say, but these deputations, with the then primitive means of travel,—for the mail coach required 131 hours to perform its journey from Edinburgh to London,—proved both exhausting and expensive. On one occasion, for instance, two of the magistrates, one being the future Lord Provost George Drummond, sent in a bill for £276 : 10 : 6.<sup>3</sup> This little bill covered an eighty days’ visit, and included servants’ charges. The Council seem at first to have had a burning desire to get as much as they could out of the Union. In these days every man had a vote, although in a very round-

<sup>1</sup> Leaflet in Town Council Museum addressed “To the loyal and religious hearts in Parliament; some few effects of the Union proposed between Scotland and England except God prevent will fall out.” The writer says there will be: “1. The loss of our Sovereignty and Imperial Dignity. 2. The loss of our Parliament, laws, liberties, rights, and Privileges, *vide* the fable of the hare and her young in harness. 3. The loss of our antiquity, Cham’s curse is upon us. 4. The loss of our independence. We shall all be slaves.”

<sup>2</sup> Town Council Muniments.

<sup>3</sup> Convention Papers in Council Chambers. Date 1719.

about way ; but a member of Parliament, on the other hand, was in reality a paid delegate. For example, Sir Patrick Johnston, the second member appointed after the Union, pocketed £300 a year for his services. The instructions to these representatives sometimes commenced with a preamble after the following model: "You shall from time to time acquaint your constituents of all occurrences in Parliament, and take their advice in everything relating to the trade, welfare, and all the concerns of the city, and the rest of the nation, and follow the said advice when deliberately given you. In all which you promise your utmost endeavours upon the faith of a Christian." In their list of eight specific instructions to their first member of Parliament—Sir Samuel M'Clellan—they say, "Whereas by Her Majesty's great care, wisdom, and goodness, this island is now happily united into one kingdom, you shall endeavour, as far as in you lies, to make the Union of use and advantage to all the subjects of the United Kingdom ; and particularly that we in the north part thereof may be made partakers of the privileges and liberties of those in the south. For that end you shall desire that inquiry be made who they are that have heaped up some unnecessary marks of distinction between the united nations. It seems to be a very valuable privilege which our fellow-subjects in England enjoy to be trusted in matters of crime and forfeiture by a double jury before sentence can be pronounced against the

criminal. We earnestly entreat you to move for the extension of the privilege to subjects of this part of the nation if consonant to the articles of the Union and honour of the nation.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The complete set of instructions to M’Clellan will be scanned with interest, more especially as it has never before appeared in print:—

“Instructions from the Magistrates and Town Councill of Edinburgh to Sir Samuell M’Clellan as their representative to the Parliament of Great Brittan, anno 1708.

“As the knowledge wee have of your ability and good qualifications for this service has led us to the choice of you as Burges for this Brough to serve in the Parliament of Great Brittan, so the confidence wee have of your honesty and sincerity in the service of your country encourages us to recomend these few heads as necessary parts of your duty, as matters of trust reposed by us in you our representative.

“1. You shall cheerfully concurr in granting to Her Majestie the necessary supplys for carrying on the warr against France, that thereby she may be enabled to establish peace in Europe upon honourable terms and solid foundations, and if Her Majestie shall have contracted any debts for the necessary defence of the nation upon the accompt of the designed descent from France, you shall concurr in making effectuell provisions for payment thereof.

“2. The Royall Navy being not only the great bulwarks for defence of these islands against our eneymes, but trade, without which the warr cannot be carried on, is thereby guarded and preserved, wee doe earnestly recomend to you to endeavour with all your power and interest to obtain such sufficient convoys for this part of the island that wee be defended thereby from the insults of pirats, and those that have been ordered for that effect hitherto if faulty may be taken notice of, and that what laws shall be thought necessary for establishing and procouring a good discipline in the navie, you cheerfully concurr therein.

“3. Whereas by Her Majesties great care, wisdom, and good-

The removal of the Court to London, occurring at a time when Scotland had not yet recovered from  
ness, this island is now happily united into one kingdom, you shall endeavour so far as in you lye to make the union of use and advantage to all the subjects of the United Kingdom, and particularly that wee in the north part thereof may be made partakers of the priviledges and liberties of those in the south, and for that end you shall desire that enquirey be made who they are that have keepped up some unnecessary marks of distinction betwixt the united nations, and for that end it seems to be a very valueable priveledge which our fellow-subjects in England enjoy to be tyrtsted in matters of crime and forfeiture by a double jury .befor sentence can be pronounced against the criminall, which we earnestly entreat you may move to be extended to the subjects of this part of the nation, if consonant to the articles of the union and honour of the nation.

“ 4. That you are to cleir the matter als far as in you lye, how just and equiteable it is [that] the sole power of Justices of Peace [should] continow in the hands of the Lord Proyost and Baillies of this Brough within the same and priveledges seclusive of the Justices of Midlothian, and for that effect you are impoured to consult with lawyers as you think necessary to concurr with you in defence of the above said right, and to impart from time to time your progress in this affair, and have the advice of the Magistrates and Councill here.

“ 5. You are to use your outmost endeavours to procure a victualling office established at the Port of Leith, and to inform yourself of the conditions, pryces, of the severall sorts of provisions which the victualling offices have in South Brittan, and to inform the Magistrates thereanent, and the conditions and encouragements the officers of South Brittan, that the victualling office here have the same.

“ 6. You are likeways to use your outmost endeavours to procure ane act for erecting a dock in the harbour of Leith for Her Majesties service where you will find 17 foot water at high stream for ordinary, and by carrying out the peer, there will be — foots more.

“ 7. You are desired to inform yourself of the Queen's



the effects of the troublous times at the close of the preceding century, threw the chief burghs into a

gift of the prysadge wine in favours of the City of London, and to use your outmost endeavours to procure the like gift in favours of the City of Edinburgh.

"8. In respect the custome house here obleidges the merchants to take transires for there goods from Leith to Edinburgh, notwithstanding there produceing there sufferances, and befor they give transires obleidges them to depon, which is contrary to law, and traders in the South part of Brittan are not lyable to, so you must endeavour that the merchants of this part of Brittan be not in a worse condition or in the least imposed upon contrary to the custome and laws, but that the merchants of North Brittan be upon ane equall foot with the merchants of South Brittan in this case and all other cases anent trade.

"And likways mind the privelleges of the merchants of Edinburgh which they had by Act of Parliament to give transiferes for the goods they sell within the toun to goe to the country, which will appear by our own book of rates.

"Wee, the Lord Provost, Magistrates, and Conveener of the trades of the City of Edinburgh doe send you these instructions as most proper for the publick good, and suitable to our and the Councill's instructions, upon good and mature deliberation and best advyse had thereupon, conforme to the power given by the Councill to us for that effect. Signed by us at Edinburgh, 29th November 1708." This document, which is signed among others by Sir Patrick Johnston (then Lord Provost), and by Dean of Guild (afterwards Lord Provost) Warrender, is preserved among the papers belonging to the Incorporation of Hammermen. The importance of having a wet and dry dock at Leith for "the benefit of Her Majesty's service, as well as for the preservation and safety of the trade of Great Britain," formed the subject of a great deal of correspondence between the Town Council and Sir Patrick Johnston during the Parliamentary session of 1710. In the end Sir Patrick reported successful advocacy of the scheme.

state of profound financial distress. From all quarters came a bitter cry, and the Parliament of the Four Burghs at its annual meetings in Parliament Square had to face a shoal of petitions graphically describing the straits to which their constituents had been driven.<sup>1</sup> The city of Glasgow, which in 1691 had obtained liberty to sell the lands and barony of Provan to pay their debts, complained (1705) that many traders, "unable to pay up the proper proportion of the public burdens laid upon them," had "given over trade and left the town. The condition of the city was so low that the number of the inhabitants who paid stent was several hundreds less than at the Revolution, and made the burden upon those who remained unsupportable; hence arose animosities and grudges against the magistrates thereof, as if it were in their power to diminish the burdens." Describing the great decay of trade in 1729 Glasgow says that eleven traders had lately "stept aside," while others had removed to London, Bristol, and Edinburgh, and the expenditure so far exceeded the income "that in a short time the burgh must entirely sink."<sup>2</sup> Passing to the other districts we find that in the town of Ayr many back houses had "fallen down and been turned into

<sup>1</sup> The illustrations which follow are taken from the Convention papers newly found in the Council Chambers.

<sup>2</sup> There was a striking contrast in 1802, when, as Sir James Marwick informs us, the "Second City," in a dispute with Perth, claimed precedence in the Convention of Royal Burghs on account of their wealth.

kaill yairds and cornfields." The wool industry having suffered by the Union, Peebles bemoaned their "languishing and deplorable circumstances." Trade had "dwindled to almost nothing," and the burgh had been "reduced to the last extremity." The souters of Selkirk had sustained great losses through "the extreme demands that were masterfully imposed upon them by the rebels at Kelso and Jedburgh," having been obliged to furnish the whole of the Highlanders with shoes, "for which," they pathetically add, "they never got one farthing." Queensferry was "in a very melancholy condition," there being no trade or shipping, and the magistrates having even to grant bonds for their servants' salaries, which they had been unable to pay for several years. Their sixteen great ships and several barques and boats had been reduced by the enemy to two ships and some small barques. Most of the Bo'ness seamen had been obliged "to go abroad to earn a bit bread where they best could." In the case of Culross, the "small trade they had, and were famous for, namely the making of gridirons (girdles), was quite broke up." Perth, "the seat of the rebellion," was in "poverty and debt," and "the fabric of the town was in a most miserable condition." These were hard times for haberdashers and tailors. We find the pedlars of Doune saying, "Our situation is such, in a poor, pitiful village nine miles distant from Alloa, the nearest seaport town, that there is not one person in our town (the minister

excepted) who wears a hat, or is there in it a room wherein a gentleman can conveniently lodge, or a person (one man excepted) who can afford a loan of £5." Alloa stated that in their case the Convention's tax roll "was only adding affliction to the afflicted." Forres had only "one merchant of any importance, and even he was going to return to Findhorn." Kintyre wanted funds to repair a bridge over "ane impetuous burn where people had been lost in the winter." Banff had very little trade, and no harbour "except only a shuffling water mouth." A committee, reporting to the Convention at Edinburgh, as to the damage caused by sand, gravely announced "that twenty coaches might pass across the mouth of Banff harbour in a breast." Fortrose "had not one footbreadth or length of anything called common good." "The weight and substance of the burgh of Kirkwall had fallen into the enemy's hands; two of the bailies and four of the town councillors had been carried prisoners to Dunkirk,"—and amid all these troubles they "had to support one of the greatest fabrics of a church in the kingdom."

These lugubrious pictures were, doubtless, overdrawn so as to make a good case for obtaining money from the Convention purse. But they had also the effect of inducing this august organisation to send to Parliament a petition for the dissolution of the Union,—a curiously-worded document not unlike the Home Rule petitions of the present day.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Town Council Muniments.

By the year 1715 the civic rulers of Edinburgh appeared also to have changed their minds upon this important question. So much, at least, may be inferred from the instructions given to their Parliamentary representative. The member for Edinburgh<sup>1</sup> was commanded to "go cheerfully into all laws for the further security of the present succession in our sovereign King George's family, and for extinguishing all hopes of the Pretender." But he was also "to do his utmost to assist in the legal dissolution of the Union so destructive to the city he represented, and grievous to all good Scotsmen." "Ye shall," continued the instructions, "lay before Parliament the sad ruin and desolation come upon this city by the Union in its ceasing to be the Metropolis of our nation, the meeting-place of the House of Parliament, Privy Council, resort of our Peers, gentry, and others." In the event of failure to bring about a dissolution of the Union, they naïvely suggest that he should strive for the next best thing. "For such great loss, and for defraying the heavy charge of the City Guard, and for augmenting the number of our churches and ministers, and for other emergencies, ye are to demand the annexation of the two pennies on the pint of ale to the common good for ever."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sir George Warrender, Bart.

<sup>2</sup> Town Council Muniments. Williamson's Directory informs us that Mrs. Robertson, Gosford's Close, sold the best twopenny.

As Admiral of the Firth of Forth, the Lord Provost had onerous duties to perform, having to look after the interests of the traders in the matter of convoys, and to despatch cruisers to the Firth of Forth whenever the enemy's privateers were reported to be within sight. Much was not expected from the small vessels at his lordship's disposal. "Sail to the back of the May," was the instruction given on one occasion, "and then return to Leith Roads; the sight of your ship will frighten the privateers off the coast for a few days."<sup>1</sup> An excuse for shirking this disagreeable work seemed to be eagerly embraced. One captain declined to go because his "furnace was down." "I could not boil any provisions," he said, "but in tubs on the deck, which is not possible when the ship is under sail."<sup>2</sup>

When the moment of greatest danger had arrived, the Town Council levied a regiment of 1200 men and put the city into a better state of defence.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Letter from Lord Provost Sir Robert Blackwood to Captain Stewart, of H.M.S. *Greyhound*, January 1712. Town Council Muniments.

<sup>2</sup> Town Council Muniments.

<sup>3</sup> The following was the oath of allegiance: "I — do, in the sincerity of my heart, assert and acknowledge that His Majesty, King George, is the only lawful and undoubted Sovereign of this realm, as well as *de jure*, that is of right king, as *de facto*, that is in the position and exercise of the Government; and therefore I do sincerely and faithfully promise and engage that with heart and hand, life and goods, I will maintain and defend His Majesty's title and Government against the descendants of the

In an address to the Throne they loyally placed their "lives and fortunes" at the service of the King and Government. This magnanimous resolution was conveyed through their Parliamentary representative to the Earl of Mar,<sup>1</sup> one of the principal Secretaries of State, who subsequently raised the standard of the Stuarts at Braemar. In this connection it is curious to note that so early as 1709 the Lord Provost was forwarding confidential communications about the Pretender to the Earl of Sunderland, Captain-General of the forces in England,<sup>2</sup> who all along bartered his information for French gold. The accession of George I. drew forth an address from the person pretending to be Prince of Wales during the life of the late King James, and since his death pretending to be and taking upon himself the style and title of King of England by the name of James the Third, or of Scotland by the name of James the Eighth, or the style and title of King of Great Britain, and their adherents and all other enemies who, either by open or secret attempts, shall disturb or disquiet His Majesty in the possession or exercise thereof."

<sup>1</sup> Town Council Muniments.

<sup>2</sup> "We have had wandering reports here for some weeks of a new invasion from Dunkirk by the Pretender. We have no certain information, but the first report has within those eight or ten days grown a little warmer. Our disaffected people appear most persuaded to join, and of this I acquainted the Earl of Seafield and the Earl of Leven and Brigadier Wightman. Though I cannot learn of any particular or credible account given of this matter yet I find it my duty to lay it before your lordship that in all doubts we might have the direction necessary."—Letter from the Lord Provost (Sir Patrick Johnston) to the Earl of Sunderland, 8th November 1709, Town Council Muniments. Three years later the health of the Pretender was drunk in Parliament Close amidst much excitement.

Corporation stating: "The time has now come when it shall appear whether those who have been zealous for the Protestant succession in your Majesty's royal family, or the favourers of the Pretender to your Crown, do most deserve the odious name of faction; when the sacred terms of loyalty and religion shall no more be prostituted for the concealment of designs for Popery and arbitrary power; when ministers shall no more cover their crimes by sheltering themselves under the name of the Sovereign; when truth and integrity shall be inseparable from great officers."<sup>1</sup>

Passing over the familiar details of the Rebellion, we find that after the Duke of Argyll's victory at "Dumblain" the Town Council of Edinburgh sent their congratulations to the leader of the King's troops. In an address to the King, framed with poetic fervour, they said of the Duke: "We saw him with incredible celerity steal a march for our preservation, and when, by his surprising expedition he had chased the enemy from our gates, we saw his restless vigilance carry him back to Stirling in time to baffle the rebels' purposes, and drive them back to their former quarters."<sup>2</sup>

A long series of compensation claims for losses sustained through the Rebellion were subsequently lodged with the Town Council.<sup>3</sup> For example,

<sup>1</sup> Town Council Muniments.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* The address was probably framed by George Home of Kello, conjunct Town Clerk at this time.

<sup>3</sup> The illustrations following are taken from the papers in the Council Chambers.



payment was demanded for coal and candle supplied from 12th October to 21st November to the lawyers, writers to the signet, and clerks who had to keep guard in Parliament House. In the case of a wealthy burgess who complained that the rebels had pulled down and erected a battlement on the roof of his house near the town wall, a Committee of no fewer than fifteen was commissioned to report on the damage. The case of James Kincaid appeared to be worst of all. A battery had been raised on his property in Carrubber's Close, from whence the cannon were directed upon the enemy with unexpected results. "The free blast of powder hath demolished not only the glasses," said he, "but blown out the whole casements, and shaken the walls, insomuch that several of the stones of the chimneys did fall down, and some tiles on top of the houses are blown off, causing the tenant and his servants to be afraid of their lives." Another curious claim for remuneration was presented by a shoemaker who had been engaged to search passengers at the Port of Leith.

When questions of indemnification were under consideration after the rising of '45, a singular application was made by a baker named Andrew Elliot. He had been ordered by the Town Council to take his waggon and bread to Coltbridge, and to attend constantly upon the little army opposing the young chevalier. After "the Canter of Coltbrigg," as the retreat of the panic-stricken dragoons was dubbed in ridicule, the waggon took the road to

Dunbar and Berwick. Meanwhile, notwithstanding their protestations of loyalty, and extensive preparations for defence, the magistrates guarded the city in such a half-hearted manner that the occupation of Edinburgh by Highland troops was effected without a blow being struck. Mr. Alexander Stewart, Lord Provost, was subsequently prosecuted by the Government for neglect of duty in not having taken proper precautions for defending the city ; but after protracted investigation he was acquitted. In view of this trial Andrew Elliot's petition possesses some interest. Describing his troubles, and making out a case for compensation, he stated that on his way from Dunbar to Edinburgh for a fresh supply of bread, "the waggon and two stout horses drawing the same were seized by a party of the rebels, who by this time had arrived in Edinburgh and were stationed eastward toward Prestonpans." In certifying this claim the Lord Provost said: "These orders I gave you, and I thought they had not been disputed by anybody now when my trial is over, and the town of Edinburgh no longer in the hands of those that wanted to suppress every evidence that did justice to my conduct at a time when political and interested views disposed them to blacken it as much as they could." One of the Edinburgh magistrates—Bailie Wilson—who had fallen into the rebels' hands and been carried to Dalkeith, made a piteous appeal to his colleagues. In his letter he urgently asked them to "meet the

neighbours” and consult as to his ransom, which they were to send with “a fresh courier.” He had been unable to get a horse, and had entrusted the letter to an “express” messenger. In his postscript—written doubtless with a pistol at his head—he added: “You must also send 2000 loaves, and money will be instantly paid by Lord George Murray.”

Claims were made for damage caused also by the “Government’s friends in the city.” A stabler in the Grassmarket, whose house had been chosen for a guard-room, “as being the most convenient place to inspect and defend the West Port,” complained that during their stay the soldiery “knockt down and burnt two new closs beds,” the account for which, as well as for rent, he promptly submitted. William Brown, another stabler, who lived in the West Bow, petitioned to be appointed beadle of one of the city churches. He had undergone various troubles, but what had given him “the head-stroke of all,” was the late Rebellion. “All the while the Hylandmen was in the place they had a guard at his door, with sentries at the fore door and two at the back door, and would let nobody enter the house. But the Irish dragoons, they dung all,” destroying his corn and cutting his hay, “which was very good.” They had also “broke down his hecks (racks) and mangers; burnt his coall and candell, and stolle both sheets and blankets; in short, they ruined him.”

James Wilson, smith, had been "imprisoned by the Highlanders in the Abbey of Holyrood House for exerting his utmost in carrying on the public works in defence of the Government, whereby he suffered both in person and purse most grievously." The details of his claim resemble a lawyer's account. During his absence "his house and shop were rifled and robbed no less than three times; moreover, he was obliged to pay two guineas to one Broddie for obtaining back his bail bond of £500 sterling, and was ordered by His Majesty's military for the better accommodation of the army and their quarters in the town to furnish iron work to the ports and elsewhere to the value of three pounds sterling seventeen and three-pence halfpenny, and the like sum of £3:17:3½ to the Abbey, as also the sums of £12 to the Castle of Stirling, and £3 to Blackness, and because he was not employed by the proper engineers but only by the officers of the army, none of the engineers being in the place, he received an absolute denial of payment of all these sums, and of late was obliged to pay half-a-crown in the pound for tents and targets." Only one other incident in connection with the Rebellion need be given. It is taken from the *Scots Magazine* for 1770, and is as follows: "A gentleman, struck with the uncommon good appearance of an elderly man who generally sits bareheaded under a dead wall in the Cannongate opposite to Lord Milton's house requesting alms of those who pass, had the curiosity to inquire into his

history. The old man turned out to be Sir John Mitchell of Pitreavie, who had formerly a very affluent estate. In early life he was a Captain in the Scots Greys; but was 'broke' for sending a challenge to the Duke of Marlborough in consequence of some illiberal reflections thrown out by his Grace against the Scottish nation. Queen Anne took so personal a part in his prosecution that he was condemned to transportation for the offence; and this part of his sentence was with difficulty remitted at the instance of John, Duke of Argyll. Exposed in the hundredth year of his age to the inclemency of the weather, it is hoped the humane and charitable will relieve him from a situation which appears to be a severe punishment for what at worst can be termed his spirited imprudence." A subscription list was opened at Balfour's Coffee House for the unfortunate baronet.

## PARLIAMENT SQUARE REMINISCENCES

The city jail—Howard the philanthropist—Ten o'clock drum—City Waits—Places of execution—The gibbet—"Heart of Midlothian"—The New Tolbooth—Inventory of the Town Council "wardrobe"—Magistrates and the German dwarf—The south "Buithraw"—Earliest known Tolbooth—Praetorium of the Burgh of Edinburgh—Fire of 1700—Town Council's "Act of Reminder"—Trained bands resolution—Scottish Paternoster Row—An old-established firm of booksellers—Scenes witnessed from Parliament Close house windows—Incidents of the fire of 1824—Sir Walter Scott and Nasmyth on the roof of St. Giles—A printer's unique experience.

PARLIAMENT CLOSE, at the time of which we write, was, of course, totally different from what it is now. Indeed, till the beginning of this century—when sweeping improvements were effected—the original name faithfully described it as a mere close, a close that twined round the south and east sides of the Cathedral Church. In place of the County Buildings<sup>1</sup> and the Buccleuch Statue,<sup>2</sup> a continuous line of houses with quite a number of wynds and closes, some of them important thoroughfares to the Cowgate,

<sup>1</sup> Erected 1817.

<sup>2</sup> Unveiled 9th February 1888.

stretched from Lawnmarket to the Old Tolbooth, immortalised by Sir Walter Scott in the *Heart of Midlothian*. At first the place where taxes were paid, these Tolbooths came in course of time to be used all over Scotland for the transaction of public business, and latterly as mere prisons. The "Heart of Midlothian" in its day presented many strange contrasts, various parts being simultaneously occupied as a "Thieves' Hole," a Court House, and a meeting place for Convention, Council, Justice Aires, Court of Session, and, in the reign of James VI., for the Scottish Parliament itself.<sup>1</sup> The "Thieves' Hole" could lay claim neither to security nor cleanliness, and the philanthropic Howard was thoroughly dissatisfied with it on the occasion of his two inspections. His second visit, after a lapse of five years, was made about the time that the South Bridge was founded, and it would have given him much greater pleasure, he said, had he seen a new prison.<sup>2</sup>

The City Guard in their last days occupied the ground floor of the Tolbooth, and at ten o'clock sent out their drummer on his nightly rounds by the Lawnmarket, down the West Bow, along the Cowgate, up St. Mary's Wynd, and back to his quarters.<sup>3</sup> Following upon the drummer came the "City Waits" — a band of skilled musicians em-

<sup>1</sup> Privy Council Records, introduction to vol. xi. p. xxviii.

<sup>2</sup> *Scots Magazine*. The visits were paid in 1782 and 1787.

<sup>3</sup> *Notes and Recollections of the Tolbooth Church*. By William Brown, F.R.S.E., F.R.C.S. Printed for private circulation, 1867.

ployed by the Council to play late at night to lull the people to sleep. These "waits" wore uniforms, and had certain privileges attached to their office. When a vacancy occurred in their ranks there was keen competition for the place, but, on the other hand, one instrument sometimes descended from father to son for several generations.<sup>1</sup> An occasional graduation in music attested the ability of the performers.<sup>2</sup>

For thirty-five years onward from 1785 executions took place on the one-story flat-roofed house built against the west end of the Tolbooth.<sup>3</sup> Prior to that time the Market Cross and the Grassmarket<sup>4</sup> in turn witnessed the closing scenes associated with the death penalty. Executions first took place at the north side of the County Buildings about 1820. In cases where the crime was particularly atrocious, the body of the criminal was, after execution, enclosed in an iron frame and suspended from a gibbet in another quarter of the town. This custom, in vogue in the latter half of the eighteenth century, was supposed not only to strike evildoers with terror, but to afford "a comfortable sight to the relatives

<sup>1</sup> Town Council Muniments.

<sup>2</sup> Appendix B.

<sup>3</sup> "On 20th April 1785 Archibald Stewart, convicted of repeated acts of housebreaking was executed on a jibbet erected on the west end of the Luckenbooths adjoining the prison. He is the first who has suffered at this place of execution."—*Scots Magazine*.

<sup>4</sup> The last execution in Grassmarket was on 4th February 1785.



and the friends of the deceased.”<sup>1</sup> To the bulk of the citizens it was exceedingly odious, and ingenious arguments were advanced for removal of the gibbet from one neighbourhood to another. The case of Greenside affords an illustration. While the situation of the gibbet, observed the scandalised residents, might have been proper enough when the ground was a common moor, and there were few improvements in “the country,” “nothing but the neighbourhood of the gibbet hindered Greenside from being distinguished by a frequency of country houses.”<sup>2</sup> The Calton Hill was suggested as a more proper and convenient site. In 1765, when the gibbet with its ghastly load was transferred to the east end of Leith Links, Leith folk objected to its removal from “the most public highroad in Scotland, where it had been fixed for a century, no doubt with design of being viewed and considered by passengers of all sorts.”<sup>3</sup>

On account of the limited accommodation of the Old Tolbooth, the municipal authorities decreed so early as June 1560 that a new one should be built. Following on the lines of the Corporation, Queen Mary in February 1562 ordered that the Tolbooth should be taken down. The Council thereupon formally resolved to demolish their building and make “another Tolbuith in the west end of St. Giles

<sup>1</sup> Blackie's *Cyclopædia*.

<sup>2</sup> Town Council Muniments, date 1751.

<sup>3</sup> Town Council Muniments.

for the Lords of Session." The Lords' Council House, as this building was called, was entered by the great Norman porch removed at the close of last century. Two years afterwards a new Tolbooth was erected outside the kirk, at its west end, for the accommodation of the Town Council. This building, known as the High and Laigh (low) Council House, served the town until 1811, when the Corporation went to the Royal Exchange, their present quarters, direct from laying the foundation stone of St George's Church.<sup>1</sup> In 1747, while occupying the New Tolbooth, the Town Council took an inventory of their "Wardrobe," the contents of which afford a glimpse of social life at that period. Stowed away in the "Magazine below Parliament House" was "the theatre that is set up at the Cross on solemnity days," and seven timber spouts, besides "five white iron lanthorns for the stair when the theatre, etc., are carried out"; the Maiden (guillotine) and frame thereof, and a large knife in a box"; the gallows, scaffold, etc., and an old pulpit, said to have belonged to John Knox. The fire apparatus included 6 boathooks, a large speaking-trumpet, and 120 fire buckets, of which 24 were in the City Guard-House. There were "over 107 lamps for the streets and lanes of the city; twenty-four stroops for setting the lamps upon, and two spare ones; a large lead cistern for oil; two pair large pewter, seven pair brass, and three pair white metal candlesticks; four pair iron,

<sup>1</sup> *Scots Magazine.*

and one pair brass snuffers, eighty-six dozen links, a chimney rake, and two lame chamber potts." In the cistern were "five hogsheads and two gallons of oil; sixteen gallons for the city lamps, and a half hogshead for the church." For the "numerous and respectable members" of the Convention, there were "six furms," besides "two other ones." The pictures decorating the Council House included the "Royal Oak,"—for the magistrates were keen racing men, and chief patrons of Leith races—Fort Keill, and David Bruce—all in frames; and a view of Gibraltar without a frame. There was also a copy of the Decalogue. At Provost Drummond's lodging—also included in the "Council Wardrobe"—were to be found "Matthew Buckinger's picture; a 'piece' done by Alex. Baillie, Magna Charta, Carthagen, Portobello, and Sir John Bernard."<sup>1</sup>

"Matthew Buckinger's picture," a work of art still preserved in the Council Chambers, has a very curious history that illustrates the amusements of Council life in the past. Buckinger was a German dwarf, thirty-three inches in height, who paid a visit to Edinburgh in 1729, when he was fifty-five years of age. He was born without hands or feet, but had acquired remarkable skill as a penman, draughtsman, musician, and juggler. At a time when the local reporter felt it incumbent to describe in detail the

<sup>1</sup> This registered inventory was found many years ago in the repositories of the late Dr. John M'Cleish of Murrayfield, Edinburgh. It is now in the Council Museum.

appearance of a camel or an elephant, and direct attention to the exhibition of "that uncommon animal an Ethiopian savage,"<sup>1</sup> the visit of this extraordinary dwarf occasioned the most profound amazement. Catching the infection, the magistrates received him with open arms, and invited a friendly exhibition of his skill. Of what took place there is a permanent record. The picture, twenty inches by fifteen, is full of artistic detail, and executed with such delicacy that it is undoubtedly one of the finest specimens of penmanship a man could set his eyes on. To convey an adequate idea of the work would be hopeless: only a general impression can be attempted. An elaborate monumental centrepiece is filled with the Decalogue, and pictures of patriarchs, prophets, and Bible scenes. Matthew's portrait adorns the upper right-hand corner, and beneath is a biographical sketch of himself, partly written, and partly printed in letters that could not be distinguished from an impression with type. With some conceit he describes himself as "a wonderful little man," and says he was the last of nine children, had been four times married, and had a family of thirteen. He "played on various musical instruments, such as the hautboy, a strange flute in concert with the bagpipe, a dulcimer, and a trumpet," and his instruments were all of his own making and invention. He could "make a pen, perfectly well and quick, play at cards and dice, perform leger-demain tricks" and "play at skittles or ninepins to a

<sup>1</sup> *Edinburgh Courant.*

mathematical nicety." Buckinger went through his programme in presence of the Lord Provost and magistrates; and, underneath a very fine copy of the city arms on the left-hand upper corner of the picture, they sign a written declaration that they have seen the dwarf "make a pen, write, draw, and do several things most dexterously according to his own declaration." A somewhat similar picture is to be found in the British Museum.

Of the earliest known Tolbooth—the one occupied in the time of Robert Bruce—some interesting information is to be found in a privately printed work by Mr. Peter Miller, F.S.A.Scot.<sup>1</sup> It was situated in what was then known as the Buithraw—a line of houses, public offices, and law courts, that occupied a space in front of St. Giles' Kirk, at the south-east end. This Buithraw divided the two cemeteries of St. Giles, and the Council exacted a toll for the use of a thoroughfare known as "The Through-Gang," leading from the one side to the other. As "the Prætorium of the Burgh of Edinburgh," this Tolbooth is mentioned in St. Giles' Chartulary so early as 1368. The neighbourhood underwent a radical change about the end of the fourteenth century after it was burned by the English, but it still continued the centre of official and public business—a characteristic it has steadily maintained for at least six centuries. The Council deserted the place and built the "Heart of Mid-

<sup>1</sup> *City Cross and Luckenbooths.*

lothian" on a site obtained from Robert III., but for many years afterwards they drew rents from the lawyers and wholesale merchants who occupied the offices and shops in the remodelled Buithraw. About the end of the seventeenth century George Home of Kello and Robert Blackwood, both Provosts of Edinburgh, and Thomas Robertson of Lochbank, son of Bailie Thomas Robertson, a wealthy and enterprising builder, occupied houses on the south side of Parliament Square.<sup>1</sup>

In dealing with the interesting district near Parliament Close, one cannot fail to be struck by the frequency with which it has been devastated by fires; even the oldest sasines generally supply the information that the lands were "biggit" on the sites of burned houses. The great fire of 1700 commenced behind Parliament Close, in a small court occupied by lawyers, and, spreading eastward, seized hold of the fifteen-storey houses that had taken eleven years to build. In a private letter containing a graphic account of the fire, Mr. Duncan Forbes, father of the celebrated president bearing that name, says that Corserig (David Home, a Lord

<sup>1</sup> Charter granted by Lord Provost Home to Sir George Warrender, 1699, which mentions that Bailie Robertson's house was "possessed by the Juridical Faculty for their library." The Charter is No. 2237 of the Laing Collection in the library of the University of Edinburgh. These charters, numbering over three thousand, relate to various parts of the country, and careful abstracts for reference have been nearly completed by the Rev. John Anderson.

of Session), newly roused from his slumbers, was seen "naked, with a child under his arm, hopping for his life." Between three and four hundred families were burned out, and, he adds, "all the pride of Edinburgh was sunk."<sup>1</sup> Occurring on a Sunday, and at a time when Scotland was suffering from the horrors of famine, this fire was regarded as "one of many tokens of God's wrath," and the Town Council recorded "their Christian sentiments thereanent."<sup>2</sup>

The entire east side of Parliament Close, as well as half of the south, at this time, and for another century after it was picturesquely rebuilt, contained

<sup>1</sup> *Culloden Papers*.

<sup>2</sup> After another disastrous outbreak in the Lawnmarket, and a gunpowder explosion at Leith, both resulting in loss of life, they gravely framed a special Act of Reminder to be read at Whitsunday and Martinmas of each year. This Act, prompted possibly by the recollection of many a tavern headache, bound them "in the Lord's strength to be more watchful over their hearts and ways than formerly," and "to reprove vice with due zeal and prudence." A few years later, the Captains of the Trained Bands likewise came to the conclusion that these calamities were "a rebuke by God for the great growth of immoralities within the city and suburbs." Following the example of the Town Council, they drafted a long resolution binding each member of their organisation "to be more watchful over his heart and ways than formerly, to reprove vice with due zeal and prudence as opportunity presented itself, and to endeavour to promote the rigorous execution of laws made for the suppression of vice, and punishment of the vicious." Omission to read this resolution twice annually, as "a lasting and humble memorial of the aforesaid fires," involved a fine of twenty merks Scots.

the finest houses in town. Even its topmost flats were tenanted by merchant princes and the nobility; personal comfort then, as now, being sacrificed to the great god—Fashion. On the south side were the President's Stairs, leading to the Cowgate, and on the east the Admiral's Stairs, leading into Old Fishmarket Close. In the spaces between the buttresses on the south, as on the north side of St. Giles, were shops or "krames" of two flats, the upper being reached by a ladder. The carriage entrance to the east of St. Giles was scarcely one-third its present width, being closed to that extent by a block of buildings occupied by John's Coffee House and a host of business premises. This corner of Parliament Square has been aptly called the Cradle of Scottish Printing, and also the Scottish Paternoster Row.<sup>1</sup> Not only were the first printing offices in the kingdom established here, but there were many prominent booksellers' shops within a very short radius. Besides Kay, whose caricatures were a never-ending source of amusement, there was the familiar shop of Bell and Bradfute, now one of the oldest bookselling firms in Scotland, having a history extending over one hundred and sixty years. It was the habit of the firm to keep the same books in the window for an indefinite period—not only law books, but works such as Schiller's *Robbers*, which is known to have faced the public in precisely the

<sup>1</sup> *An Octogenarian Printer's Recollections*. By Leslie Fleming. Printed by the Edinburgh Typographia, 1898.



same place and position for years. In the *Memoirs of Adam Black* this trait of the house forms the subject of an amusing anecdote. "I have," he says, "heard of a gentleman who, after residing for several years in India, wrote to a friend in Edinburgh to send him out a certain book, of which he could see a copy in Bell and Bradfute's window. When the friend called, the book was found as described." The same authority informs us that "the accounts of some of the booksellers were kept in the most slovenly way, and long unsettled," and that "there was something roguish in them besides confusion." Two in the trade who could never come to a settlement, each maintaining that books charged had been returned, at last adjourned to a tavern, and over some tumblers of toddy agreed to give each other a full discharge without further investigation. Bell and Bradfute, the only firm that kept accounts with accuracy, were regarded by their professional brethren as disagreeable "protectionists." This feature, however, may have accounted for their long term of prosperity. Though the old designation has been maintained, there is now neither a Bell nor a Bradfute connected with the firm.

From the lofty windows of Parliament Square many an interesting spectacle might have been witnessed: the annual Riding of the Scottish Parliament in state from Holyrood; judges bewigged and robed, wending their way of a morning to the Court; lawyers, with becoming gravity, leading their

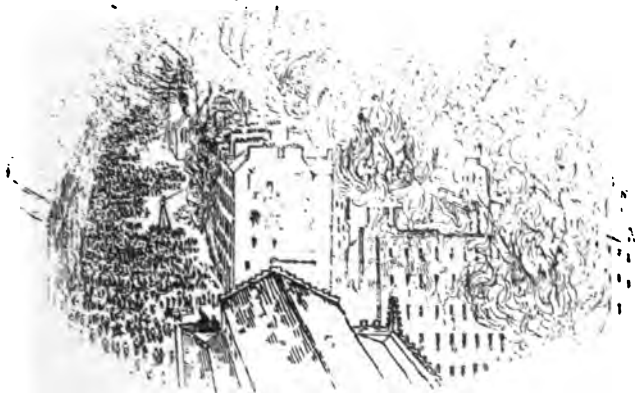
eager clients to John's Coffee House consultation-room, or thirsty Parliament House clerks slinking across for their indispensable "meridian"; busy merchants haggling about the price of "the silver spoons," the nuptial ring, and the bride's trousseau; and more interesting still, "Jingling Geordie," in his cocked hat and scarlet cloak, conducting King James to his seven-foot-square booth, and merrily burning a royal bond for £2000 to prove that his fuel was much more costly than the perfumed wood used in Holyrood. There also, last century, might have been seen Dr. Pitcairn, the Scottish poet and physician, meditatively strolling to his favourite tavern, along the low and dark passages of which he had to grope his way; the unseemly literary fracas between James Stuart of Dunearn and Duncan Stevenson, printer of the *Beacon*; Sir Walter Scott briskly hobbling to the Court to hear the latest rumour about the Great Unknown; the grateful pensioners daily receiving charity from the genial Sir William Forbes as he hurried from his famed banking-house "with a profusion of gray locks tied in a club, and a cloud of hair powder flying about him in a windy day"; and the brave royal birthday parade of the Town Guard when they punctuated with blank cartridge the civic toasts drunk in Parliament Hall, and then marched off to their quarters amidst a volley of unsavoury missiles from an unfriendly mob. But the excited patriots that daily awaited the decision of the Union Parliament, and the angry mob that

nearly tore the Chancellor and his confederates limb from limb upon the consummation of the Union, formed perhaps the most memorable spectacle of all.

Old citizens still remember the disastrous three days' fire that in November 1824 nearly swept away the whole of the property lying between Parliament Close and Conn's Close southward to the Cowgate.<sup>1</sup> The fire commenced at ten o'clock on a Saturday night on the second floor of a house at the head of Old Assembly Close, occupied as a workshop by Kirkwood, the well-known engraver. Sir William Johnston, of the firm of W. & A. K. Johnston, was at that time a youth in Kirkwood's employment. Anxious to secure the books under his charge, he darted into the burning building, and upon returning with his trophies, narrowly escaped a terrible death. He had just reached the bottom of the turnpike stairs when a mass of molten lead from the roof landed on his back. His clothing was burned, but he himself had the good fortune to escape uninjured. After a night and day of intense excitement—some of the judges and law officers of the Crown zealously manning the engines—the flames worked their way down the High Street. Eager to obtain a good view of the scene, James Nasmyth, inventor of the steam hammer, and his father, founder of the Scottish school of landscape painting, ascended the tower of St. Giles. "When," says he, "we emerged from the

<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to Bailie Gulland and Mr. J. W. Weston, deputy clerk of police, for some of the incidents which follow.

long dark spiral stairs, we found a select party of the most distinguished inhabitants looking down into the vast area of fire ; and prominent among them was Sir Walter Scott.”<sup>1</sup> Burning embers were at this time wafted eastward in such profusion that men were engaged to brush them from the roofs of the South Bridge houses. At length the flames communicated



VIEW OF THE FIRE FROM THE ROOF OF ST. GILES'—BY LIZARS.

with the Tron Church steeple, from the sides of which poured streams of molten lead. The collapse of the quaint wooden spire was followed by Sir Walter Scott's pithy comment, "Eh, sirs! mony a weary, weary sermon hae I heard beneath that steeple!"

The height of the burning houses added to the impressiveness of the scene, the like of which had

<sup>1</sup> Smiles' *Life of James Nasmyth, Cockburn Memorials*, p. 422.

never been witnessed since the English burned the city three hundred years before. Sir Walter Scott "could conceive no sight more grand or terrible than to see these lofty buildings on fire from top to bottom, vomiting out flames like a volcano from every aperture, and finally crashing down one after another into an abyss of fire, which resembled nothing but hell; for there were vaults of wine and spirits which sent up large jets of flames whenever they were called into activity by the fall of these massive fragments."<sup>1</sup> "Auld callants" domiciled at that time in George Heriot's Hospital recall the excitement with which they watched the conflagration from their windows. The grandeur of the spectacle was ample compensation for a sleepless night.

An old lady of our acquaintance used to describe the difficulties encountered that night on her way home from a juvenile party; the streets were almost impassable even on foot. Wrapped in a shawl, and seated on the broad shoulders of a faithful Highland servant, she observed crowds of homeless and half-clad citizens seeking shelter at the south base of the Castle Rock. The High Street was a scene of confused bustle, amid which people ran hither and thither collecting and indiscriminately piling their household gods in the middle of the thoroughfare. Not only wearing apparel and furniture, but crockery, cooking utensils, and fire-irons were objects

<sup>1</sup> *Familiar Letters*, vol. ii. p. 225; and Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, vii. p. 282.

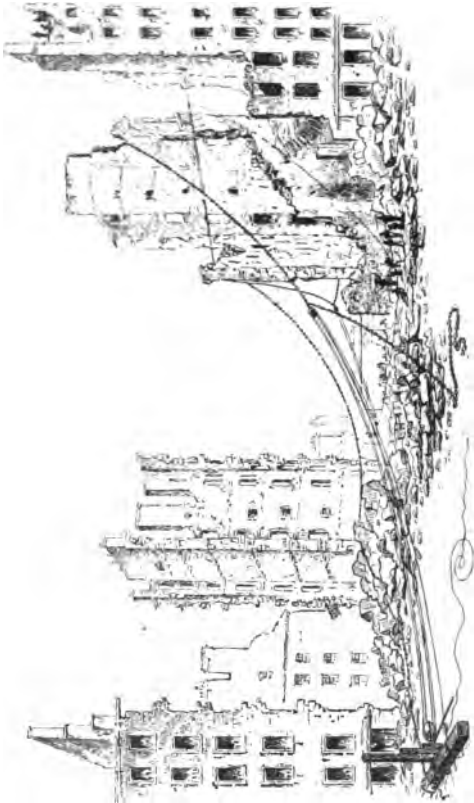
of earnest solicitation. She also remembered the frantic endeavours of the policemen to prevent heartless plundering, which the numerous closes rendered somewhat easy of accomplishment. The Highland servant reached home in safety with his precious burden, but was attacked with unusual melancholy



THE FIRE OF 1824—BY LIZARS.

when he tossed off the glass which rewarded him on special occasions. And no wonder, for after being used as a bed-warming pan, the bottle with its contents had been innocently placed in the pantry by a domestic. A master printer—John Moir—had a unique experience. When the fire occurred he was

finishing the second of two 12mo volumes entitled  
*The Scots Compendium ; or Pocket Peerage of Scotland,*



DEMOLISHING THE RUINS OF HIGH STREET BUILDINGS—FROM THE COLLECTION  
PUBLISHED BY THE RELIEF COMMITTEE.

but the work after all was not published till two years  
later. The first volume, with the imprint of 1824,

contains a note dated 1826, in which it is explained that "the appearance of these little volumes has been considerably retarded by the complete interruption which was given for many weeks to the printing of them, in consequence of the calamitous fires which took place in the High Street of Edinburgh last winter. The printer's office, indeed, was for two successive nights surrounded by flames, and although it was not destroyed, part of the impression was injured, and a considerable time lost by the necessary removals occasioned by the disaster."

A curious contribution to the relief fund was made by a private of the Midlothian Yeomanry, who gave "a one pound note blown towards him when on duty near the Cross in connection with the fire." Robert Chambers wrote *Remarkable Fires in Edinburgh* to stimulate public sympathy, and the Relief Committee published eight large engravings for the same purpose. The demolition of the towering ruins of an eleven-storey house which threatened to tumble on the busy thoroughfare greatly exercised the minds of the people for several days, and the success of the blasting operations was a matter of the warmest congratulation. A reference to the accounts of the Relief Committee serves to show the state of feeling. For a sailor, who had "saved the Tron Church," a gift of three guineas was considered ample recognition; but to Daniel Miller, who had given "his services at blowing up the ruins," a piece of plate valued at £21 was required in order adequately to express the gratitude of the Committee.



## THE HIGH STREET IN OLDEN TIMES

Insanitary habits—Dirtiest town in Europe—A Lord Provost summoned to the Police Court—Scenes at the Market Cross—Old Guard House—Salt Trone—Barbarous punishments—Jenny Geddes and other “puir kail wives.”

THREE centuries ago the High Street of Edinburgh was not the most attractive place for a saunter, each “land” having its own dunghill, in which the swine grovelled at will. It has been facetiously suggested that the citizens thought lightly of their insanitary surroundings, from the fact that at a later period one of the flourishing taverns near Borthwick’s Close rejoiced in the name of “The Cock and Trumpet,” which a huge signboard pictorially represented to mean a cock crowing on a midden. But the “Cock and Trumpet” was the crest of Acheson of Gosford, who lived in Bakehouse Close, Canongate, and probably its use at the tavern was merely a conceit of one of his late dependants. Still, there was ample room for sarcasm. The canals of Amsterdam and the byways of Cologne were sweet

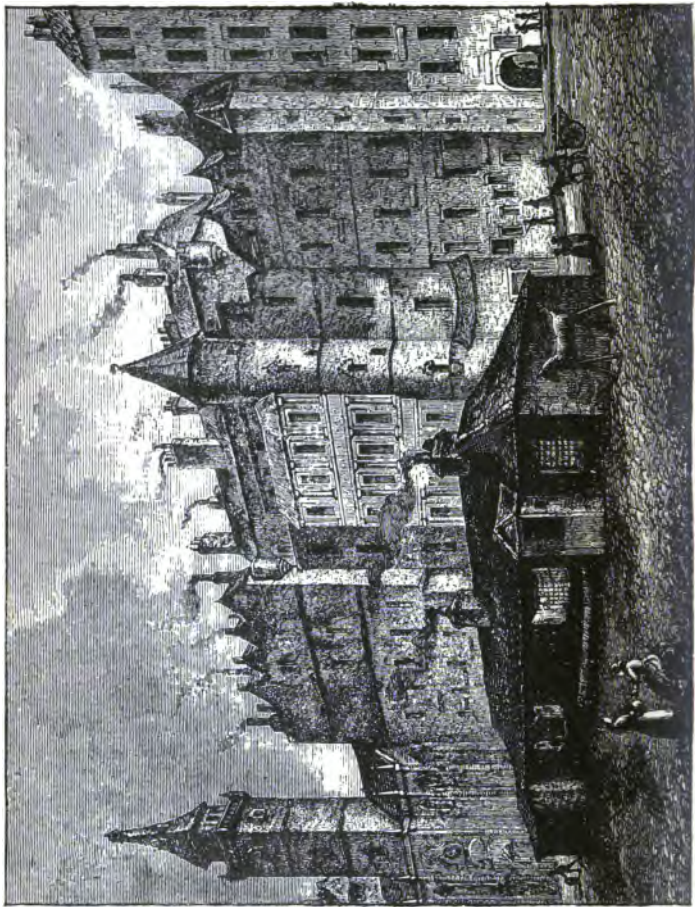
and refreshing after a sniff of "the dirtiest town in Europe," with its distinctive Trone heap of fish offal and other abominations. Hence the expressive apostrophe, "Sweet Edinburgh! I smell thee noo!"

Garbage and household refuse continued to be thrown from windows till this century was well advanced, and many yet remember the grating of the opening window, the terrible cry of "Gardez l'eau," and their own startled appeal to householders to "Haud their hand." The Police Records show that the practice was quite common this century, not only in the old town, and in such a fashionable quarter as George Square, but also in the new town. Distinguished personages, such as Lord Provost Coulter, appear among the delinquents.<sup>1</sup>

On the highway between Parliament Square and the Tron Church stood the ancient Market Cross, with its curious and gruesome memories.<sup>2</sup> When printing was unknown it was here that the citizens

<sup>1</sup> Police Records, 1808. In point of fact, while the householders were summoned, the servants, many of whom had been brought up in the lower quarters of the town, were the real offenders.

<sup>2</sup> The City Cross was restored and erected at the east end of Parliament Square by the Right Hon. W. E. Gladstone in November 1885. The following is a translation of the Latin inscription: "This ancient monument, the Cross of Edinburgh, which of old was set apart for public ceremonies, but having been utterly destroyed by a misguided hand A.D. MDCCLVI., was avenged as well as lamented in song alike



became acquainted with the newest Act of Parliament and the latest scandal, and where for generations were enacted scenes of revelries and merry-makings, varied by cruel tortures and barbarous executions. The lighter side of the picture had its humours. On public occasions, after loyally drinking the King's health on bended knee, the civic rulers lavishly distributed among the populace the cheap wine that flowed from the spouts of the richly decorated edifice, and sweetmeats from specially erected well-laden tables. It was on one of these occasions (19th June 1660), as Wodrow reminds us, that "three hundred dozen glasses were broken and cast through the streets," the idea being that they should never be debased by any other sentiment. Adjoining the Market Cross was the pillory, or Bankrupt's Stone, where on a market day three centuries ago sat business unfortunates in fantastic statutory garb consisting of a partly yellow and partly brown bonnet and coat (according to a pattern kept by the magistrates)—the alternative being three months' imprisonment.

But there are pathetic, as well as social and whimsical memories connected with the Market Cross. From its Gothic bastions, as laboriously recorded by Pitscottie, mysterious voices were heard on the eve

noble and manful, by that great man Walter Scott, has now by favour of the magistrates of the city been restored by William Ewart Gladstone, who claims through both parents a purely Scottish descent."

of the fatal battle of Flodden, coming from heralds and pursuivants—

Strange, wild, and dimly seen ;  
Figures that seemed to rise and die,  
Gibber and sign, advance and fly.

The death-roll of Flodden was announced to the terror-stricken crowd, and "all the lave perished" save one, who courageously exclaimed, "I for my part appeal from your summons and judgment, and take me to the mercy of God."<sup>1</sup> Scenes more memorable still were enacted at the Market Cross, for thither were dragged the gallows, from which swung the brave Kirkaldy, and the Maiden, which fell alike upon the neck of the miscreant and the noble-minded, upon the intriguing MacCallum More and the great Montrose. Had it a tongue the Market Cross of Edinburgh, like some venerable bard, might tell an entrancing story, but of the picturesque enthusiasm of the Jacobites and the tyranny of conquering foes, of quaint and cruel custom and sanguinary street brawl, its cold gray stones are but silently eloquent remembrancers.

Many years before the authorities dreamt of sweeping away the City Guard-House from the head of Bell's Wynd, the unoffending Market Cross had been callously transported to the estate of Drum. Sir Walter Scott describes the Guard-House as a long, low ugly building, which to a fanciful imagination might have suggested the idea of a black snail crawl-

<sup>1</sup> *Chronicles of Scotland*, p. 267.

ing up the High Street. At the west gable was a wooden horse which delinquent City Guardsmen had to stride with their feet tied to a musket. In this ludicrous situation they were for hours the butt of a mob that was only too glad of an opportunity for showing dislike towards this unpopular body of men. The town sweeps occupied a little house at the east end of the building, and were called Trone men, from their proximity to the public beam for weighing merchandise. This beam, known as the Salt Trone, to distinguish it from the Butter Trone in Lawnmarket, was mounted on steps in the centre of the highway, and gave its name to the Tron Church. Primarily designed for weighing merchandise, it came also to be used as a pillory, where, with the utmost stringency, were carried out those cruel exhibitions of scourging, tongue-boring, nose-pinching, and "lug-nailing" common at that time throughout the land.

Our forefathers' punctiliousness in the matter of punishments was one of the grim features of these barbarous times. The Trone for minor punishments; the Market Cross for the death penalty. Indignities after death were similarly regulated. Gate spikes for an ordinary, and the highest spike on the Tolbooth for a distinguished head, with varying degrees of exaltation between. In the vicinity of the Trone were the stances of "the puir kail wives" (Jenny Geddes among them), whose ready banter would doubtless form an unwelcome addition to the tortures of the pillory. These women seem to have been

always ready in their own homely way to join in popular movements. The signing of the Solemn League and Covenant by Charles II. was a special occasion for rejoicing, as it enabled them to display their ardour in a cause which the St. Giles' incident had almost led them to regard as peculiarly their own. Upon receipt of the welcome news the citizens danced on the streets all night long, and the kail wives, fired by the widespread enthusiasm, extravagantly tossed their stools and baskets into a huge bonfire. Jenny Geddes, of course, parted only with a spare stool, and preserved the real "cutty" for the Antiquarian Museum. It is refreshing to learn that in her old age the St. Giles' heroine conducted her green-grocery business from a comfortable leather chair, and by general consent dispensed justice to her quarrelsome cronies.<sup>1</sup>

In still earlier times this part of the High Street was blocked on the north with booths for chapmen, and on the south with booths for hatmakers and

<sup>1</sup> The following curious notice concerning one of these women appeared in the *Edinburgh Courant* in May 1725: "There has died Eleanor Stewart, the noted woman of St. Giles' Parish, aged 124 years, 6 months, and odd days: when living she used to be carried about in a chair, as a remarkable instance of long life; and after her death great numbers of quality went to see her corps. She was interred in St. Giles' Churchyard; four of the oldest men that could be got in the parish walked before her and six of the oldest women supported the pall. We hear that a tombstone is preparing for her, and that a certain ingenious gentleman has undertook to furnish it with an epitaph."

skinner; game being sold near the Market Cross, and slaughtered sheep near the Trone beam. A graphic idea of the difficulties under which traffic in Scottish towns was conducted in these days may be gathered from an incident which resulted in the



A SCOTTISH STREET INCIDENT.

framing of a short Act of Parliament. The Act appears among the collection published and dedicated to James VI. by John Skene of Curriehill, and is entitled "Of ane horse carrying twa scheip and burning of ane mill." A shepherd having a couple of sheep under his charge endeavoured to reduce



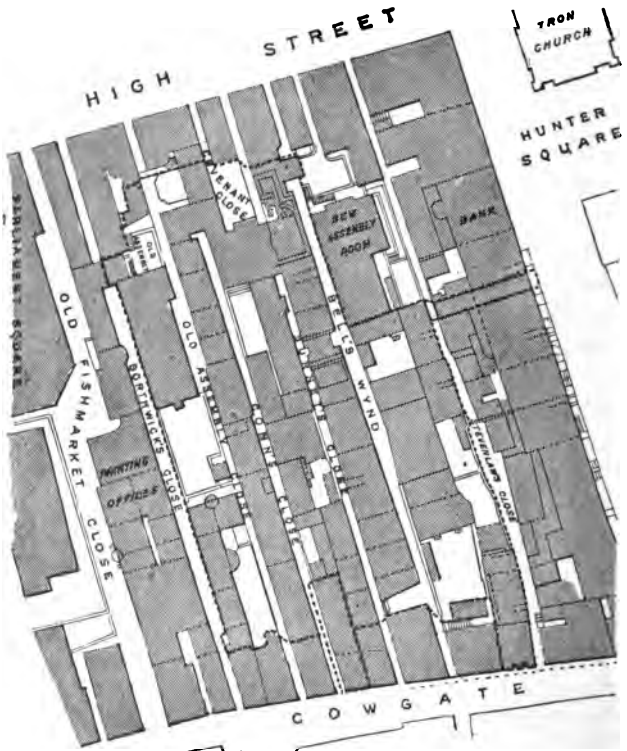
labour to a minimum by tying them together by the necks. In the High Street—of what town the Act leaves us in ignorance—lay a horse “with ane sair back,” and the sheep passing one on either side drew the rope across the horse. “The tow wherewith they were bound touched his sair back, whereupon he was moved to rise up,” and gallop off with the sheep dangling at his side. A ludicrous chapter of accidents followed. Rushing hither and thither, the horse in its agony passed through the open door of a mill, trampled “ane fire in the middle flure; and the fire being scattered, the mill was burnt wi’ the twa scheip and the horse.” The apportioning of the damage between the respective parties formed the main object of the Act, but into this it is unnecessary to enter, sufficient having been said to illustrate the easy indifference with which for years some extraordinary customs were regarded.

## FISHMARKET CLOSE

Resort of the oyster gourmand—Fishmarket humours—Corporation “feast of shells”—Curious petition from a Newhaven fisherman—Distinguished inhabitants: George Heriot, Defoe, Lord President Dundas—The *Courant*—Famous editors—Town Council and reporters—Dr. Neill, printer and scientist—Shoemakers’ Market—Old Post-Office—The London mail—Father of the Penny Post—Amusing petition from Postmaster Williamson—The Hangman’s House.

SCOTTISH life in all its picturesqueness might have been admirably studied last century at the head of Old Fishmarket Close.<sup>1</sup> To the west, stretching from

<sup>1</sup> Fishmarket Close is frequently mentioned in the Burgh Register of the sixteenth century. At that period it sometimes bore the name of Swyft’s Wynd. A sasine dated 1583 states that Mr. James Gray, advocate, and Helen Sinclair, his spouse, acquired “the great mansion or dwelling-house of Hugh, Earl of Eglinton, on the south side of the High Street, at the head of Swyft’s Wynd, otherwise called ‘the Auld Fysche Mercat Close.’” Another sasine of the same date states that Swyft’s Wynd was on “the south side of the High Street from the vicinity of the Mercat Cross.” There was at this period a Swyft’s Close near the Netherbow, where also the Fishmarket for a time was held. Reference is made to the house of the



**PLAN OF SOUTH SIDE OF HIGH STREET,  
 AREA ENCLOSED THUS----TO BE REMOVED UNDER IMPROVEMENT SCHEME**

St. Giles half-way across the High Street, was the block of buildings that housed the circulating library which was established by Allan Ramsay,<sup>1</sup> and afterwards carried on by MacEwan, printer; Kincaid, the eminent publisher; and the distinguished but penurious Creech. "Creech's Land" commanded an extensive view of the magnificent scenery of the Firth of Forth; but for Gay the poet, Sir Walter Scott, Burns, Smollett, and all the wits of the day by whom the library was patronised, the busy thoroughfare with its ballad singers, its leisure-loving merchants, its quaintly-attired groups of gallivanting powdered and ruffled dandies, its beautiful ladies in torch-piloted sedans, and its characteristic street-cries, formed perhaps even a more enchanting picture. "Eating, learning, and law seemed to be enthroned side by side in this place," remarks a witty observer,<sup>2</sup> "for it was the cynosure of all the taverns, fishcreels, and booksellers' shops of the city." And then she describes an amusing street scene. "On any evening

late John Swyft in a sasine dated 1596, where it is described as a "foreland" with two annual rents going to James Wynrahame, servitor to Oliver Colt, advocate.

<sup>1</sup> In the City Muniments there is a packet of petitions (dated 1758-68) by "Allan Ramsay, of London, painter," relative to his late father's property at Castlehill, and the improvement of the locality. There is also a plan of the neighbourhood and of two houses proposed to be built "in the London fashion for the accommodation of two genteel families" on the ground occupied by the Old Bell House, and by part of Mr. Ramsay's garden adjacent thereto.

<sup>2</sup> Mrs. Johnston.

from October till March the oyster gourmand took his stand at the head of Old Fishmarket Close, and enjoyed his delicious regale in its utmost earthly perfection—swallowed alive with its own gravy the moment it was opened by the fish-wife, who operated on a shell with a dexterity of manipulation, a rapidity of fingering which no pianoforte player we ever saw could compare with; nothing indeed could be compared with it, except the eager voracity of those genuine lovers of the oyster, to whom these piscatory Hebes ministered.”<sup>1</sup> Stewart’s Oyster House in Old Fishmarket Close was one of the haunts of the promoters of the *Mirror*, the appearance of which marked a new era in the literature of Edinburgh. The club consisted of Henry Mackenzie, Lord Craig, Lord Abercomby, Lord Bannatyne, Lord Cullen, George Home of Wedderburn, William Gordon of Newhall, and George Ogilvy, advocates, and at the weekly meeting one of the most interesting occupations of the evening was the examination of the contents of the contributors’ box which stood open for correspondence at Creech’s door in the Luckenbooths.<sup>2</sup>

To the numerous monasteries and religious houses in Edinburgh, a plentiful supply of fish was in pre-Reformation times a matter of considerable

<sup>1</sup> Schoolboys with a relish for oysters sometimes purchased as many as a dozen with their luncheon bawbee, and when dealing with a good-humoured fishwife generally contrived to earn a thirteenth with a chivalrous kiss.

<sup>2</sup> Chambers’s *Scottish Biography*, article “William Craig.”

importance. Frequently monasteries had fish-ponds of their own, but in Edinburgh this was unnecessary, and the Old Fishmarket, being conveniently situated, doubtless replenished the larders of more than one generation of monks. Edinburgh was supplied not only with salmon from the Tay and the Tweed, and white fish from Newhaven and Musselburgh, but also with trout and eels from the Nor' Loch. For the special benefit of Trinity Hospital an eel-ark was constructed near the loch outlet, and remained there till this century was well advanced. Provision was also made for the plebeian epicure. Over a shop door in Lawnmarket a prominent sign-board announced that within might be had "Cooked Nor' Loch Trout for Supper, and Eel Pies." Seeing that the loch was the tragic tomb of innumerable witches, and other uncanny beings, consumers of these dainties could not have suffered from excessive delicacy of palate.

For nearly a century the Fishmarket nestled at the southern end of the North Bridge. Dividing the western portion of the market was a three-storey tenement, having its two lower flats filled with crockery and fish, and its top flat with people who were voluntary prisoners until the officer unlocked the gate each morning. The only existing copy of a curious public notice presents a graphic picture of the state of the market in 1810. From this we learn that many brought fish in baskets and creels that were "shamefully neglected as to cleansing,"

and that the porters and caddies not only failed to wash their towels, but kept them in "a disgraceful state of repair." The Superintendent had to report the fishwives with the cleanest and best ordered stand, and to reward two of the most deserving with seven shillings. The report and reward were to continue for the first twelve months, "when it was hoped every individual would see the advantage of keeping the market clean without the offer of reward or the infliction of fines."<sup>1</sup>

A vivid description of marketing is given by James Nasmyth.<sup>2</sup> When a likely customer approached, she was at once surrounded by the "caddies," a set of sturdy, hard-working women, each with a creel on her back. The rival caddies pointed at the customer, violently ejaculating "She's my Leddy! She's my Leddy!" and peace did not reign until the customer had selected her own caddie. Every customer was approached in the same way. On one occasion a buyer named Thomson offered a ridiculously small sum for a parcel of fish. The indignant seller ejaculated, "Lord help yer e'esight, Maister Tamson;" and on being asked what the eyesight had to do with the fish, she answered, "Because ye hae nae nose tae put spectacles on." As it happened, Tamson, by accident or disease, had so little of a nose left that the bridge for holding spectacles was almost gone.

<sup>1</sup> Town Council Muniments.

<sup>2</sup> Smiles' *James Nasmyth: a Biography*.

In the supply and price of shell-fish, the municipal authorities took considerable interest. When the beautiful and melodious "caller ou" was one of the most familiar of our Edinburgh street-cries, a civic "feast of shells" became an established institution. This function was almost as enjoyable as the modern Water Trust excursion. The Council had been granted the oyster scalps under a charter by James IV., and at the commencement of each season they asserted their jurisdiction by drinking wine in the Square at Newhaven, and afterwards solemnly cruising over the oyster-beds in the Firth of Forth. The much-prized large fat oysters sent to the Edinburgh market were said to owe their excellence to the brackish streams that flowed from Prestonpans Salt Works. The fishermen of Prestonpans, emboldened presumably by this circumstance, frequently poached on their neighbours' oyster scalps—even going so far as actually to appropriate for their harbour the name of Newhaven. A curious petition on the subject has been preserved in the city archives. James Flucker, in name and by authority of the whole of the fishermen in Newhaven, who, "with that awe and humility so becoming to them," and "that modest confidence which the protected naturally feel when addressing their protectors," represented to the Town Council in 1788 that unless protected against further encroachments "the oyster beds would soon be beds without oysters." "The present supplication," he says, "is occasioned by the



daring presumption of the east country fishermen, who, notwithstanding the prohibition of the magistrates, embraced every offering opportunity of dredging on the city's oyster grounds. Unawed by the threats of such authority, they seem to set power at defiance. Impunity with them but multiplies offence and the hope of escapeing increases their presumption, uncorrectible by the gentle influence of lenity."

Centuries of ill-feeling culminated that year in open warfare at sea. On one of these occasions the Newhaven fishermen chased two boats into Fisherrow Harbour, but were prevented from seizing them by a mob which arose in their defence. Subsequently, a fierce encounter, lasting half an hour, took place off the Black Rocks. Oars and boat-hooks were freely used, and after many on both sides had been wounded, the Newhaven men triumphantly towed their adversaries into port. The oysters, so jealously guarded, were taken by the cartload to market, where a large placard, now in the Antiquarian Museum, prohibited their sale at a greater price than one shilling per hundred.

Half a century ago the chief supply of fish for the Edinburgh market was landed at the Chain Pier, and carried from thence to Newhaven, where the men's work finished and the women's began. A bright spring morning generally witnessed a pier-head scene both picturesque and ani-

mated. Eagerly displaying their glittering treasures were strikingly-dressed groups of healthy, sonsy, merry fishwives, whose shrill, powerful voices, it is true, did not always make the sweetest harmony. But amid their light-hearted banter these women contrived to keep one eye steadily on business, and the 'cutest dealer, wearied with his sleepless vigil—for sometimes he had to be at Newhaven by three o'clock in the morning—generally came off second best with his bargain. The herring fishing, which attracted every man in Newhaven—the older plying their nets in the Roads, and the younger going to the deep water—was followed by three weeks' leisure at the close of the season. Edinburgh was consequently without white fish for nearly two months at a time. What made matters worse was that the North Sea swarmed with dog-fish, and until their numbers were thinned by dynamite they often picked the lines nearly clean. One dealer remembers having visited Newhaven every morning for six weeks and seen only two small cod on the pier. This scarcity, of course, raised prices, and haddocks frequently commanded as much as 1s. per lb. The fish was conveyed to Edinburgh in barrows, and even the masters themselves thought lightly of taking the trams. There were only four fishmongers in town at the time referred to—Strachan, Gilfillan Reid, Robert Dalziell, and John Anderson; and these, with the exception of Strachan, afterwards commenced business in the New Town.

Notwithstanding its unsavoury surroundings, Old Fishmarket Close, from its central situation, was once a favourite residential quarter, and had dwelling-houses which for magnificence were unequalled in the city. With many stirring scenes it was also closely identified, eager combatants pouring out of its recesses when summoned to their chieftain's side by clashing arms and fierce party cries. But after all, it is associated less with romance than with disaster—its history in this respect being almost unique. Battered with cannon at the siege of Edinburgh Castle,<sup>1</sup> twice the centre of great conflagrations, and once the starting-point of a great plague,<sup>2</sup> this close has now little more than memories to arouse antiquarian interest.

Of the distinguished personages who lived here, only a brief list has been preserved, but to one of these Edinburgh owes a deep debt of gratitude. With his fortune-making still in the future, George Heriot commenced married life here in 1586 at the

<sup>1</sup> Kirkaldy cannonaded the city in 1573, and the houses in the neighbourhood of the Fishmarket suffered very severely. R. H. Stevenson, in his *Chronicles of Edinburgh*, gives currency to the story that some of the fish were scattered about the street, and driven so high that they fell on the tops of the houses. The poorer classes began to gather them, but five persons were killed and twenty wounded by a cannon ball.

<sup>2</sup> Moyse states that in 1588 the contagion was brought from St. Johnston through a servant girl employed in Fishmarket Close. These pestilences closed the law courts and completely paralysed business, while the victims were hastily buried in out-of-the-way parts of the churchyard, or even on lonely hillsides far from human habitation.

early age of twenty-three.<sup>1</sup> The house he occupied belonged to his father-in-law, Simon Marjoribanks, whose name appears in an original receipt as his landlord in 1590. Heriot was twice married—the second time to the eldest daughter of the first Earl of Rosebery's grandfather (James Primrose), a gentleman whose industry and talents had raised him to the honourable office of Clerk to the Privy Council. Heriot also survived this lady, and Sir Walter Scott hazards the conjecture that “the loss of a young, beautiful, and amiable partner at a period so interesting was the probable reason of her husband devoting his fortune to a charitable institution.” It was, however, in his earlier years of married life that “Jinglin' Geordie” made his fortune, the turning-point being that day in July 1597 when, standing with swelling heart in his daintily-furnished house in Fishmarket Close, he heard amid the flourish of trumpets at the Market Cross the proclamation of his appointment as goldsmith to Anne of Denmark, the gay consort of James VI.

In the middle of last century the Chambers of the Lord Advocate were in Old Fishmarket Close, and Sir Walter Scott records an amusing incident concerning one of the distinguished occupants—President Dundas of Arniston (father of the younger President, and of Viscount Melville). After the Court had risen one Saturday afternoon, a solicitor and his clerk applied to the King's Counsel for

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Steven's *Memoirs of George Heriot*.

assistance in drawing an appeal case—a matter of some difficulty in these days when appeals were rare. “The Lord Advocate had changed his dress and booted himself, and his servant and horses were at the foot of the close to carry him to Arniston. It was scarcely possible to get him to listen to a word respecting business. The wily agent, however, on pretence of asking one or two questions which would not detain him half an hour, drew his lordship, who was no less an eminent *bon vivant* than a lawyer of unequalled talent, to take a whet at a celebrated tavern, when the learned counsel became gradually involved in a spirited discussion of the law points of the case. At length it occurred to him that he might as well ride to Arniston in the cool of the evening. The horses were directed to be put in the stable, but not to be unsaddled. Dinner was ordered, the law was laid aside for a time, and the bottle circulated very freely. At nine o'clock at night, after he had been honouring Bacchus for so many hours, the Lord Advocate ordered his horses to be unsaddled; paper, pen and ink were brought; he began to dictate the appeal case; and continued at his task till four o'clock the next morning. By next day's post the solicitor sent the case to London, a *chef-d'œuvre* of its kind, and in which it was not necessary on revisal to correct five words.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “Convivial Habits of the Scottish Bar.”—Note to *Guy Mannering*.

Lord Advocate Dundas has also been made the butt for one of Lord Cockburn's humorous shafts, the occasion being a convivial meeting between Dundas, the Duke of Buccleuch, and other Midlothian magnates.<sup>1</sup> "We found them," says Cockburn, "roaring and singing and laughing in a low-roofed room scarcely large enough to hold them, with wooden chairs and a sanded floor. When their own lacqueys, who were carrying on high life in the kitchen, did not choose to attend, the masters were served by two women. There was plenty of wine, particularly claret, in rapid circulation on the table; but my eye was chiefly attracted by a large bowl of hot whisky punch, the steam of which was almost dropping from the roof, while the odour was enough to perfume the whole parish."

For nearly one-half of its lifetime of one hundred and eighty years the *Courant* newspaper was published in Old Fishmarket Close, its contributors including Professor Wilson, Aytoun, Lockhart, De Quincey, and Hogg, while Scott himself often limped to the office on a friendly visit. One of its earliest editors was the immortal author of *Robinson Crusoe*, but judging from the tiny sheet, which was not much larger than a *Monthly Visitor*, one may reasonably conclude that Defoe's duties were of the lightest.

Mr. James Hannay, another accomplished editor, but notable in a much less degree than Defoe, was connected with the *Courant* for three or four years,

<sup>1</sup> *Memorials*, p. 14.

at a time well within the memory of not very old people now living. But, unlike Defoe, he indicated through its columns that the post he held was not the least arduous amongst those connected with the journal. His articles, in the main vigorous and trenchant, and characterised by great erudition and elegance of diction, raised the Scottish Tory organ to a high position in the public estimation. Many have yet a vivid recollection of the literary duels that occasionally took place between Hannay of the *Courant* and Russel of the *Scotsman*. Russel seemed never more in evidence than when repelling the onslaughts of his opponent, and Hannay sparred in his true element, with all the ardour of an old fighting sailor, as in some measure he was.

Among his own staff the popularity of this editor was of a high order; indeed the majority of the staff almost worshipped him. From the first he "caught on." The new editor, we are told, arrived on a Saturday morning at the office to introduce himself, but he found the premises closed, the staff having gone to Habbie's Howe on their annual summer outing. Procuring a conspicuously white horse, Hannay was soon careering to the romantic glade, and made up with the party at a half-way house. In a serio-comic vein, he roundly rated the gathering for treating him so shabbily, and vowed they would not again have the chance of bolting from him. This incident,<sup>1</sup> along with his kindness and joviality

<sup>1</sup> Communicated by an eye-witness.

amongst all and sundry that day, established him in high favour. The author of *Singleton Fontenoy*, with the *Courant* staff at least, was *par excellence* the famous editor. One of Hannay's best-known essays, a paper on Thackeray—of whom he was a special friend and great admirer—was first published in the columns of the newspaper he edited.

In those days the press was not the power it now is, nor was it deemed necessary to devote ten or twelve columns to a Church Assembly debate. The Town Council sat with closed doors until 1833, the practice being for a subordinate official to furnish an abstract of the business to the local newspapers. Mr. Charles Russell of the *Glasgow Herald*, in a recent speech to the journalists of Edinburgh and Glasgow, said that about 1820 Mr. Murray, then reporter for the *Courant*, was approached on the subject, and asked if he had any objection to stand between the doors of the Council and the Lord Provost's room to report the deliberations of the august body within. Mr. Murray was told that if he preferred it he might ensconce himself under the Council table. History is silent as to which method of note-taking he preferred. The probability is that he rejected both, for the furnishing of authorised abstracts continued until the municipal doors were in 1833 thrown open to the public.<sup>1</sup> "Nothing extraordinary from the Commons," forms the comprehensive parliamentary report on one occasion.

<sup>1</sup> From report in *Edinburgh Dispatch*.



No printers were better known last century than Hamilton, Balfour, and Neill, founders of the present still more widely known firm of Neill and Co., in Old Fishmarket Close. The business was begun in 1749 by Patrick Neill, uncle of the late Dr. Neill, whose name the firm still retains. Dr. Neill was perhaps more of a scientist than a printer, and his office in Old Fishmarket Close proved a great attraction for the scientific men of the day. He was connected with various learned bodies, including the Wernerian Natural History Society, of which he was one of the founders in 1808, and also secretary during the whole period of its existence. Most of the printing for these bodies was entrusted to his firm, including that of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, founded in 1783, the printing for which has been continued with the firm to the present day—the long period of one hundred and ten years. In some respects Edinburgh owes a great deal to this distinguished scientist—more certainly than is sometimes remembered by the present generation. To his public spirit was due the preservation of several antiquities that had been nearly sacrificed for city improvements. In this connection Flodden Tower and part of the old city wall, still existing at the head of the Vennel, may be specially mentioned. His name is familiar too through his bequests to the Royal Society of Edinburgh and to the Royal Caledonian Horticultural Society, of which latter, besides being one of the founders in 1809, he was secretary for the long period of forty years. To this day the Neill medals are coveted

honours among distinguished Scottish naturalists and horticulturists. But Neill's greatest monument is perhaps West Princes Street Gardens. Mainly through his efforts the west portion of the Nor' Loch was drained in 1820, and under his superintendence five acres of



NEILL'S CHAPEL MULL—DATE 1785.

ground were laid out, and planted with 77,000 trees and shrubs. To natural history, especially botany and horticulture, he devoted all his spare time, and on these and kindred subjects was a prolific writer. Dr. Neill died in 1851, whereupon Alexander and Patrick Neill Fraser, who had succeeded to a share of the business on their father's death in 1846, became

sole proprietors. Although the oldest in Edinburgh, this firm have lost none of their vitality, and carry on one of the most extensive printing businesses in the city. For upwards of a century they printed the "Acts of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland," and at present they are Government printers for Scotland. The last two editions of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* emanated from their press.

Some very old houses are still to be seen at the foot of Old Fishmarket Close. One of the most venerable forms part of Neill's printing establishment. Surmounting the dwarfish doorway leading to the familiar turnpike tower, characteristic of the sixteenth-century domestic architecture, appears the crest of the Hammermen's Incorporation. It has, however, been tampered with. The helmet forming part of the general decoration surrounding the crest has been converted into a face and the crown chiselled into a bust, the hammer alone remaining unaltered. This Incorporation, dating from 1483, have records as early as 1582. The principal meetings were held in the chapel of St. Mary Magdalene in the Cowgate, but some of the associated trades appear to have met in other parts of the town. Their membership was not confined entirely to craftsmen. In 1657, for example, the son of the then Lord Provost was admitted upon submitting "the portrait of a horse's leg shod with a silver shoe, fixed with

three nails, with a silver staple at the other end thereof; which was found to be a qualified and well-wrought essay.”<sup>1</sup>

A curious industry was conducted many years ago in the adjoining land. Old boots, gathered from every conceivable quarter, underwent a process of gumming, and were then temptingly displayed at suitable places throughout the city. Pasteboard boxes, boiled to pulp, were also ingeniously turned into soles for carpet shoes. In sunshine and shower the manufacturer was alike busy—at one time deluding, and at another time inventing excuses to pacify wrothful customers. In *The Coalman's Courtship to the Creel Wife's Daughter*, the wooer goes by way of the Fishmarket in order to “buy a pair of sooter's auld shoon greased black and made new.” Having in 1751 been deprived of their market in Cowgate, where “it had been kept past the memory of man,” the shoemakers, it seems, had been allotted this piece of ground upon their representation to the authorities that, “although it might be for the interest of the freemen shoemakers of Edinburgh that this market go into desuetude, yet we are very confident the lieges will soon perceive the loss, considering how great the price of freemen's work is.”<sup>2</sup>

In a little court, near the foot of the Close, the first elephant brought to Edinburgh was exhibited towards the end of the seventeenth century, and

<sup>1</sup> Colston's *Incorporated Trades of Edinburgh*.

<sup>2</sup> Town Council Muniments.

created a profound impression, the local press describing its appearance with great minuteness. Thither, also, the "Post House" was removed in 1708. The post-office at that time, and for half a century later, was of modest dimensions, with a delivery of letters easily overtaken by a single carrier. On one occasion—about 1745—the British Linen Company received the only letter carried from London;<sup>1</sup> but in more peaceful times this low record was broken. Paragraphs in the newspapers in 1760 and 1762 announced that there was nothing whatever in the London bag.<sup>2</sup>

News from London, then as now, was of considerable importance to the provincial press. The local newspapers generally delayed publication till the London mail arrived, a circumstance that frequently gave rise to intimations of this nature:—"The London post came not in till this day, being Friday 'twixt 9 and 10 forenoon, which stop't our publishing on Thursday as usual."<sup>3</sup> The disappointment consequent upon the following paragraph may be imagined:—"Since our last, we have received no mail from London, but instead of that which should have come in yesterday, we had our own mail of Thursday last returned: and it's presumed that the London mail which we should have had (by oversight of some of the post-offices on the road) is sent back to London."<sup>4</sup> Primitive although the postal arrangements appeared

<sup>1</sup> *Chambers's Traditions.*

<sup>2</sup> *Edinburgh Courant.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, January 1728.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, February 1721.

they afforded opportunity for newspaper enterprise. On the eve of going to press, the proprietor of one of the local journals used to ride to Leith, intercept the London mail, and return in haste to the city by a shorter route, in order to forestall his contemporaries.<sup>1</sup>

The Father of the Penny Post, as well as the publisher of the first series of directories in Edinburgh, was Peter Williamson. It is quite evident that his directories were compiled on purely commercial lines—names being inserted only upon payment of a fixed scale of charges. On this account the usefulness of the volumes for purposes of reference has been greatly lessened. His experiences in connection with the penny postal system are graphically described in a petition to the Town Council. Describing himself as “postmaster in Edinburgh,” he says that for eight years he had “carried on a penny post-office which conveyed letters and small parcels regularly and carefully from his office to every part of Edinburgh and Leith at the moderate charge of one penny each.” He kept “four men constantly in readiness for the service of the public, and although often imposed upon by fictitious letters being put into his hand addressed to persons not in existence, he was still willing to be useful to the community, provided the Council would pass an Act preventing any of his servants or others from setting up penny post-offices in opposition to him.” “To his great

<sup>1</sup> *Edinburgh Chronicle.*

mortification, when the petitioner challenged any of his servants for misbehaviour they had the audacity to tell him that they would establish a penny post-office of their own." The Penny Post, he explained, "delivered letters every hour in the city and suburbs, and eight times a day at Leith. Other Penny Posts were conducted by persons of infamous character who went the length of abstracting money from letters in their charge, and on being detected found it convenient to leave the place."<sup>1</sup> Letters of last century were folded, sealed, and minutely addressed with a recommendation "to ye care of ye bearer faithfully to deliver." Among others we have seen was one "For Mr. Dollaise, at his house in the entry to the Parliament House, Edinburgh. Please deliver, I pray, with care."<sup>2</sup>

The Hangman's House, one of the few buildings in Old Fishmarket Close that escaped the fire of 1824, had for its last grim occupant Jock Scott, a man who himself met an untimely end. Previous to his appointment Jock was a carter in the town's employment, but like many of the modern finishers of the law's last sentence he had been bred a cobbler, and used to eke out his earnings with such work as his less superstitious neighbours entrusted to him. Walking along the Cowgate one day, in 1844, he was roughly jostled by a master watchmaker and jeweller named Adie. Jock fell heavily in the gutter, and sustained injuries from which he died; and his

<sup>1</sup> Town Council Muniments.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

assailant was sentenced to eighteen months' imprisonment.<sup>1</sup> According to tradition, Jock used to lift his weekly pittance<sup>2</sup> from an iron-bound padlocked box attached to a door on the left hand of the covered



HANGMAN'S HOUSE AT FOOT OF FISHMARKET CLOSE IN 1824—  
FROM ENGRAVING BY THE RELIEF COMMITTEE.

entrance leading to the Royal Exchange. The mysterious box disappeared after his death, but a

<sup>1</sup> High Court Records.

<sup>2</sup> The magistrates of Perth, through the medium of an advertisement in the *Edinburgh Advertiser* in 1789 offer "7/ a week, commodious dwelling-house free of rent and other emoluments annexed to the office, to any one willing to become executioner. He would also have all suitable encouragement and protection from the magistrates."



piece of the wood by which it was attached to the door still remains to confound the sceptic. It was long before another tenant could be found for the Hangman's House, which had the reputation of being haunted. For many years it has been unoccupied, and now it is fast decaying.



GERMAN DWARF AND THE TOWN COUNCIL—PORTRAIT  
DRAWN BY HIMSELF. See p. 84.

## BORTHWICK'S CLOSE

Lord Borthwick's house—Patrick Cockburn of Newbigging—  
Napiers of Merchiston—Clarkson's tavern—Old Heriot  
School.

BORTHWICK'S CLOSE, adjoining the Central Fire Office in High Street, derived its name from an ancient and noble family that came from Hungary to Scotland with the retinue of Queen Margaret in the reign of Canmore. Four centuries later the Borthwicks acquired a town residence in Edinburgh, and became to a certain extent conspicuous Scots. Till then their name appears very seldom in historical documents, although the situation of their castle would doubtless expose them to many attacks from marauders. Borthwick Castle, familiar to travellers by the East Coast Route to the south, was built about the beginning of the fifteenth century on a commanding site two and a half miles south-east of Gorebridge, in the county of Midlothian, and is of considerable interest to the antiquary, being the finest model of the keep in Scotland; but it has long since passed out of the

hands of the family, whose seat is now in Wigtownshire. The Borthwicks, upon whom the dignity of Lord was conferred by King James II., had many superiorities over land, besides whole closes in some of the large towns in Scotland, including a substantial slice of the one which bore their name in Edinburgh. This close, prior to 1600, is frequently mentioned in the City Records.

Lord Borthwick's house was built about the middle of the fifteenth century on the west side of the close, immediately to the north of the city wall that then ran along the declivity between High Street and Cowgate.<sup>1</sup> For a near neighbour the first Lord Borthwick had Patrick Cockburn of Newbigging.<sup>2</sup> Cockburn was Lord Provost of Edinburgh, and subsequently Governor of Edinburgh Castle; and both he and Borthwick were sent as commissioners to the English for a renewal of truce after the Scottish victory at Sark. This Borthwick led a very gay life in Edinburgh, being cup-bearer to the semi-royal house of Sinclair. Earl William St Clair, who built Roslin Chapel, lived in magnificent style at the foot of Blackfriars' Wynd, and never sat down to a meal that was not served in gold or silver vessels. His wife, it is said by

<sup>1</sup> Title-deeds in City Archives. A sasine in the Burgh Register for 1597 states that George Heriot elder, goldsmith burgess, drew an annual rent of ten merks out of "three booths with low shop in the tenement sometime of the late William, Lord Borthwick."

<sup>2</sup> Title-deeds in City Archives.

Father Hay, was waited upon by seventy-five gentlewomen, including fifty-three daughters of noblemen, all clothed in velvets and silks; and whenever she went abroad after dark in Edinburgh she was preceded by eighty torch-bearers. "None matched her in all the country save the Queen's Majesty."<sup>1</sup> In the troublous times of the sixteenth century the Borthwicks earnestly opposed the Reformation, and strongly espoused the cause of the Church.

The title-deeds show that "a dwelling house or tavern consisting of eleven vents<sup>2</sup> with cellar," lay within the head of Borthwick's Close, "immediately above the new room acquired about the middle of last century by Mr. Thomas Mercer of Binhill." This, latterly, was Clark's noted tavern, the dimly lighted tap-room of which was situated underneath the pavement, and was a favourite resort of the shopkeeping class.

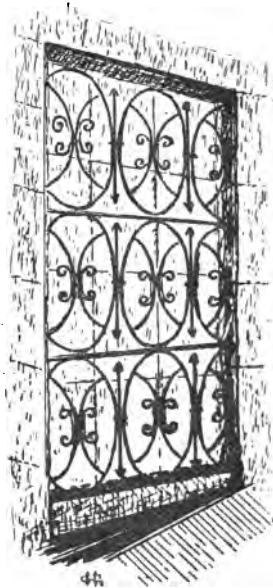
Only one really interesting landmark remains in the close—a mansion that belonged to the Napiers of Merchiston.<sup>3</sup> Rugged walls, curiously glazed windows, turreted staircase, and picturesque gables outlined against the sky, combine to make this building an attractive old-world picture—all the more singular on account of its isolation. The

<sup>1</sup> *Genealogie of the Sainte Claires of Rosslyn*, by Father Hay.

<sup>2</sup> It was needful to mention the number of vents, as there was a tax on hearths known as "reek pennies." Sometimes the expression was "fire-rooms," at other times "fire-places."

<sup>3</sup> Title-deeds in City Archives.

house came into the possession of the family through the Brisbanes, upon one of whom the title devolved about the end of the seventeenth century. Perhaps the most distinguished occupant was the sixth Lord



WINDOW RAILING IN BORTHWICK'S CLOSE—FORMERLY  
BELONGING TO SIR W. FORBES' BANK.

Napier (Francis), well known as having procured “a survey of a navigable canal to form a communication between the Forth and Clyde.” This survey was approved by the Board of Manufactures, and the canal was proceeded with, and opened in 1790.

Another building of which notice ought to be taken is the Old Heriot School, where thousands of the poorer classes received their education during its half-century's existence. The school was one of a number in which free education was given, a system founded through the exertions of the late Mr. Duncan M'Laren, M.P., and much prized by the people whom it was intended to benefit. A school building in an old Edinburgh close would never be tolerated by an exacting Education Department; but it must be said that the awkward site was skilfully utilised, and that the building and playground had a fair amount of sunshine on a bright day. Some old one-storey buildings are to be seen at the foot of the close, but they are of no historical interest. One has a back door which used to give scavengers access to a narrow lane behind the houses in Old Assembly Close. This lane, some two feet broad, was even so late as the beginning of this century made the receptacle for house refuse, which was never removed till there was a pile six or seven feet in height.

## OLD ASSEMBLY CLOSE

Sir William Rae of St. Catherine's—Lord Royston—Sir John Dalrymple of Cousland—Lord Durie's abduction—Pate Steil and his concerts in the Cross Key's Tavern—The Cross Well.

OLD ASSEMBLY CLOSE, long a favourite resort for the aristocracy, and even so recently as one hundred and fifty years ago the centre of Edinburgh fashion, can still boast of three venerable houses with reminiscences of former grandeur. Sternly grim and gray, they recall the time when fancifully-dressed lords and ladies daintily picked their steps down these narrow, dark alleys, and sedan chair-bearers pompously bore their queenly burden to assembly, concert, or evening party. Nor is the chain of thought altogether snapped upon closer inspection. Swinging upon colossal hinges are massive but sadly battered oak doors, adorned with rusty fragments of ancient tirling-pins and stiff-looking handles that have withstood generations of rough usage. The story of early-life gaiety could scarcely be told more vividly, certainly not more tersely.

At the entrance to the close there was once a towering "land," the houses in which were reached by a magnificent scale stair—a sure sign of respect-



VIEW IN OLD ASSEMBLY CLOSE—FROM ENGRAVINGS PUBLISHED BY THE FIRE RELIEF COMMITTEE, 1824.

ability in Old Edinburgh. Few of these scale stairs are now in existence, but in old title-deeds they are often linked with the names of wealthy burgesses or of noted families. The stairs had broad and roomy steps with overhanging edges, and a landing-place half-way up each storey. The turnpike stairs—



turngreis, they were sometimes called—were, on the other hand, narrow and spiral-shaped. Some idea of the internal arrangements of the houses themselves has been preserved. “The second and third storeys of the scale stair in Old Assembly Close,” we are told, “were connected by a handsome mahogany stair within;” and the house had “a dining and drawing room, each 23 feet by 16; eight bedrooms; kitchen, larder and pantry; with two good garrets and three cellars—the kitchen fitted with a perpetual oven and water pipe.”<sup>1</sup> It was in this house that Lord Advocate Sir William Rae of St. Catherine’s, son of Lord Eskgrove, was born—a circumstance likely to be long remembered, for, at the great fire of 1824, he endeavoured to save his old home by manfully working at one of the fire-engines. Struck by Rae’s energy on that occasion, a fellow-labourer gave him a hearty slap on the back and the homely encouragement, “Weel dune, my Lord.”<sup>2</sup> In a back tenement Lord Royston, son of the celebrated first Earl of Cromarty, and himself a distinguished judge, died in 1744. Sir John Dalrymple of Cousland,<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Edinburgh Advertiser*, 1788. Many of the “great mansions” in the old town were remarkably commodious. The Duchess of Buccleuch possessed “a house of seventeen rooms with closets and many other conveniences in Parliament Close.”—*Edinburgh Courant*, 1708. The Lord Advocate had a house in Society with twelve rooms. There was “a large parlour on the first floor, and two of the closets on the bed-chamber storey held beds.”—*Edinburgh Advertiser*, 1789.

<sup>2</sup> Chambers’s *Remarkable Fires in Edinburgh*.

<sup>3</sup> Title-deeds in City Archives.

whose house stands midway in the close, was appointed one of the principal clerks of Session on his father's demission from that office in 1708. His father, a man of great learning, and one of the best antiquaries of his time, was the second son of the first Viscount of Stair, and ancestor of the Dalrymples of Cranston, who now possess the earldom of Stair. Title-deeds in the latter half of last century also contain the names of Sir Alexander Hamilton, James Pringle of Bowling, one of the principal clerks of Session; Oliver Colt of Auldhame, and William Robertson of Hilhousefield.

Few of the Edinburgh closes have undergone more vicissitudes than Old Assembly Close, which has had a new name with almost every century of its existence. In the middle of the sixteenth century it was known as Little's, after Mr. Clement Little, advocate (founder of the University Library), who along with his brother, the Lord Provost, had lived there.<sup>1</sup> Another change of name took place in the seventeenth century in honour of a much more distinguished residenter—Sir Alexander Gibson, better known as Lord Durie, whose mansion stood on the site of the Old Assembly Rooms.<sup>2</sup> Durie, a great-grand-nephew of William Gibson, Dean of Restalrig, one of the original Senators of the Court of Session, took his courtesy title from his

<sup>1</sup> Burgh Register, 1580 and 1588.

<sup>2</sup> Gibson and his wife, a daughter of the famous jurist, Mr. Thomas Craig, commenced housekeeping in Borthwick's Wynd. Burgh Register, 1595.

Fifeshire estate. This estate has passed into the hands of Mr. Maitland Christie, a brother of Captain Christie, at present governor of the Calton Jail; the family itself being represented by the well-known Gibson-Carmichaels.

With Lord Durie's name tradition has been remarkably free, and given a variety of stories bearing upon an amusing episode in his life, characteristic of those lawless times. A litigant, nervous about the result of a trial in which he was interested, and having reason to suspect that Durie's vote was against him, had the Judge forcibly carried to the Castle of Harbottle, in Northumberland, and cast into a dungeon. But to the joyful surprise of his mourning family, and possibly to the secret chagrin of his prospective successor, Lord Durie, after an absence of eight days, returned to town safe and sound.

Sir Walter Scott, in *Border Minstrelsy*, gives an interesting version of this incident. The Judge, according to this account, was riding to Portobello sands for his usual airing, when he was attacked by Christie's Will, a daring mosstrooper, and carried off in the interests of a wealthy laird. Sir Walter admits, however, that for his own purposes he has drawn upon his imagination, so that one must be content with the brief and less exciting details given in Pitcairn's *Criminal Trials*. It is curious to learn that Durie's great-granddaughter, when a mere child of eleven, underwent somewhat similar treatment in 1668.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Chambers's *Domestic Annals*.

Lord Durie's abduction recalls the corrupt state of the Court of Session in these days. "Civil and criminal procedure," says Chambers, "was conducted in much the same spirit as a suit at war. When a great noble was to be tried for some monstrous murder or treason, he appeared at the bar with as many of his retainers and as many of his friends and their retainers as he could muster, and justice only had its course if the Government chanced to be strongest." Bothwell's trial for the assassination of Darnley is a noted example of this system of out-braving the law.

At the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth centuries Old Assembly Close became more than ever the centre of fashion. It now dropped the name of Durie and assumed that of Steil.<sup>1</sup> Pate Steil, specially mentioned in Pitcairn's *Lyrics*, and described by Arnot as "a great lover of musick, and a good singer of Scots songs," kept the Cross Keys Tavern, to which his fame as a musician attracted a large number of kindred spirits. A club was formed by harpsichord and violin performers—the originators of local amateur orchestral work—who "played at their weekly meetings the concertos and sonatos of Corelli and the overtures of Handel."<sup>2</sup>

These entertainments must have formed a welcome break in the otherwise gloomy days—"the dark ages of Edinburgh," as Chambers facetiously calls them—

<sup>1</sup> Title-deeds in City Archives.

<sup>2</sup> Advertisement in *Edinburgh Courant*.

following the Union. And they are interesting, too, as having originated the Musical Society which, first in St. Mary's Chapel and then in St. Cecilia's Hall, Niddry Street, brightened Edinburgh life. Steil was in 1681 a captain in the Trained Bands, and had assigned to his care "the west side of Warriston's Close, inclusive, and ending with Archibald Douglas on the west side of the Old Provost's (Fleshmarket) Close."<sup>1</sup> During his captaincy the Trained Bands held one of their meetings at his house. What became of Pate Steil we cannot tell, but the "Cross Keys" met the usual fate of houses built in this singularly unlucky neighbourhood, having been destroyed by fire in 1708.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Skinner's *Trained Bands*. About that time, as shown by title-deeds in the Council Chambers, Robert Miln of Balfarge, and Patrick Steil, merchant burgher, were heritable proprietors of "the little back laigh house with the halls, kitchen, chambers, and cellars of the same of that back land or great lodging pertaining to Alexander Abercromby, vintner," and other houses to the west of Writers' Court.

<sup>2</sup> Two quaintly-worded paragraphs about the disaster appeared in successive numbers of the *Edinburgh Courant*. "This morning betwixt four and five o'clock," says the chronicler, "a terrible fire broke out in Patrick Steil's Close, which burnt the great lodging possess'd by him, all that land, backwards towards Borthwick's Closs, and all forwards to the High Street; the two uppermost stories, possess'd by the widow of Stephen Cuthel, Vintner, the three undermost of that land being preserved. (Bless'd be God) through the prudent direction of the Lord Provost and Magistrates the fire was brought under about ten. The Foot Guards did great service by keeping off the mob, and those who could do no service about twelve they were dismissed, the danger being over." In the next issue the

At the head of the Old Assembly Close stands the Cross Well, one of fifteen erected about the beginning of last century. In dry seasons, when the capacious store wells sunk in the closes were completely exhausted, it was a common occurrence to find a hundred women in a row, moving forward to these square pieces of masonry, foot by foot, till their turn came to fill their stoup.<sup>1</sup> The sale of water in small quantities was an everyday affair, and during a drought an enterprising candlemaker found it profitable to laboriously fill a hogshead at one of the city wells, and cart the precious commodity as far as Leith.<sup>2</sup> The magistrates were very proud of their wells, and celebrated the completion of their primitive water scheme with a public ceremonial. The newspapers of 1724 record that "they made known their watery treasure by playing off all their 'fund' from the Cross Well, which discharged nearly 500 pints in a minute." With innocent conceit the writer adds: "In case of fire, which God forbid, they can spare 15,000 gallons, sufficient to extinguish a form'd fire."<sup>3</sup>

*Courant* says: "The fire which happened on Wednesday last was, through the mercy of God and the care and direction of the Lord Provost and Magistrates, together with the assiduous labour of the fire masters, prevented, and came no further than the uppermost stories of the tenement possest by Mrs. Cuthel. There are no persons that I can hear of lost, though there be some amissing, but several persons are bruised."

<sup>1</sup> *Scots Magazine*, 1759.

<sup>2</sup> Town Council Muniments.

<sup>3</sup> *Edinburgh Courant*.

## OLD ASSEMBLY ROOM

The Assembly Room—Picturesque scenes—Hon. Miss Nicky Murray—Goldsmith's visit.

ONCE more, and seemingly for the last time, this famous close changed its name in 1720, when "the big hall or great room" was selected for the fashionable reunions that had hitherto taken place in the West Bow. These gatherings, instituted in 1710 by a private association in order to benefit local charities, were not at first regarded with popular favour. Indeed the feeling against dancing was so strong that a rabble one night attacked the building at West Bow, and perforated the barricaded door with red hot spits.<sup>1</sup>

The rooms in Old Assembly Close were until 1766 the supreme attraction for throngs of gaily-dressed ladies and gentlemen. Conspicuous enough were the gallants with their Ramillies wig, or tied hair; small three-cornered hats laced with gold or silver, large skirted, collarless coats with square cuffs; silk stockings and square-toed shoes; and with

<sup>1</sup> Jackson's *History of the Stage*.

a dainty sword in their hand or dangling by their side. The gilded sedan chairs, ushered into the closes by attendants with flaring links, glittered in the fitful light, and with their lovely burdens formed a spectacle that never grew commonplace.

Solely on account of their beauty some of the ladies became historical. One of the sights of the times, we are told by Chambers, was the procession



GOING TO THE ASSEMBLY ROOM.

of the lovely Susanna, Countess of Eglinton, and her seven handsome daughters from the Stamp Office Close to the Assembly Room. The Countess was six feet in height, and had a bewitching complexion and face, while her singularly beautiful daughters were conspicuous for their stature and carriage. Long after the Countess passed away the Eglinton "air" and the Eglinton manner became proverbial.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> During his stay in Edinburgh in September 1745 Prince Charles Edward was a daily visitor at the house of the Countess of Eglinton and her daughters, who at that time resided in the Canongate. Upon commencing his march into England the Young Chevalier left his full-dress plaid of Royal Stuart



These were the days when two hooped ladies completely filled the widest footpath.<sup>1</sup> And what a curious picture they made! Their loftily-dressed, powdered hair was protected by an immense silk-covered framework of cane, which in fine weather was folded back like the hood of a carriage. Their silk capuchin, or cloak tippet, trimmed with velvet or lace, reached to their elbows, and the skirt of their long gown hung gracefully over their arm. Alighting from their sedan chair at the spacious lobby of the Assembly Room, the ladies gracefully tilted up their hoops so as to display their extraordinary finery. Not only was their upper petticoat richly embroidered, but even their stockings and garters were heavily adorned with gold and silver. For a few minutes the ladies loitered and flirted in the lobby, purchasing meanwhile their gloves from the reduced gentleman who happened to have the monopoly of the business—a position once occupied by a claimant to the ancient and extinct peerage of Kirkcudbright.<sup>2</sup> Upon entering the

tartan with these ladies, among whom it seemed to have been afterwards divided. A portion of the plaid, found among the repositories of the late Mrs. Erskine of Dunimarle, a great-granddaughter of the Countess, has been tastefully worked into a St. Andrew's Cross between four hearts, and mounted on white satin by Miss Halkett of Pitferrane. This memento is now preserved in Dunimarle Castle.

<sup>1</sup> On one occasion Sir Robert Strange, the famous engraver, hid underneath a lady's hoop when skulking for his life after the rising of '45.

<sup>2</sup> The Earl of Kelly, another nobleman associated with the Assembly Room, led the orchestra for a time.

dancing hall, which opened off the vestibule, the ladies unfolded their gigantic Dutch fan and dropped their majestic train. But their dignity and comfort were rudely sacrificed when they seated themselves, for their hoops were twisted into fantastic shapes, and their stays were so long that they touched the chair before and behind.

A burlesque reference to the social customs at the old assemblies of Edinburgh is to be found in Charles Macklin's *Man of the World*, written about the end of last century. Lady Rodolpha Lumbercourt objects to the "lemonades, slips, and slops" served at the Bath assemblies, which, she says, gave her the wooly-wambles. "In Edinburgh," she adds, "we have nae sic pinchgut doings; for there we always have a guid comfortable dish of cutlets or collops, or nice warm savoury haggis, with a guid swig of whisky punch to recruit our spirits after our dancing and sweating."<sup>1</sup>

The most notable of the Assembly Room directresses, familiar to us through Chambers, was the Hon. Miss Nicky Murray. This lady, a sister of Lord Mansfield, had an intimate knowledge of the world that, combined with good sense and firmness, eminently qualified her for the post of goddess of fashion. Seated upon a throne, at one end of the room, she rigidly watched the dancers, and had no scruples in turning out presumptuous upstarts. A railed space in the centre was reserved for dancers. On opposite

<sup>1</sup> Under the regulations of 1746 "no tea, coffee, negus, or other liquor" could be carried into the dancing-room.

sides were ladies and gentlemen waiting for a turn that in some cases never came. Only one set at a time was permitted to occupy the floor, the result being that a dancer was seldom twice up in one evening, and many really beautiful girls were merely spectators.

The gallants had generally the merit of constancy; the custom of the day compelled them. At an early private gathering in the season they were in the habit of collecting ladies' fans in their cocked hats, which were unflapped so as to hold a large number, and then they had to dance throughout the season with the lady whose fan they drew out. An unselected lady, however charming, could be only a spectator in the Assembly Room. But perhaps she was in a happier position than the lady who for a whole season had the misfortune to be inseparably linked with a thorough bore.

In 1753, a few years before the "Old" was forsaken for the "New" Assembly Close, twenty or thirty yards farther east, the dancing hall was visited by Goldsmith. The contrast between the free and easy manners of his own country and the rigid formality of a Scottish ball greatly astonished the rollicking Irishman. Sadly indeed, to his mind, did the Edinburgh people take their pleasures. "On entering the dancing hall," he says, "I saw one end of the room taken up with ladies, who sit dismally in a group by themselves; on the other hand stand their pensive partners that are to be, but no more intercourse between the sexes than between two

countries at war. The ladies indeed may ogle, and the gentlemen sigh, but an embargo is laid upon any closer commerce." Goldsmith's visit was, of course, long after the directors drew up their familiar regulations commencing with, "1st, No lady to be admitted in a night-gown," and enjoining "misses in skirts and jackets, robe-coats and stay-bodied gowns" to dance in a set by themselves.<sup>1</sup>

The gay taverns and oyster shops with which Assembly Close bristled are now little more than mere cellars. In one, used at present as a saddlery, the sign-board till a few years ago found a resting-place among some lumber. Next door was a pawnshop, that "raised the wind" for the giddy votaries of fashion who settled down for a night's dissipation after they were turned out of the Assembly Room. Here for half a century—twenty-five years by the present occupant—the clothes of the neighbourhood have been mangled.

<sup>1</sup> *Notes from the Records of the Assembly Rooms of Edinburgh.* Edinburgh: Neill and Co., 1842.

## COVENANT CLOSE TRADITIONS, HOUSES, AND PEOPLE

The National Covenant—General tenor of sermons—A clergyman outwits his elders—Appearance of “Covenant House”—The burned Covenant—Old tavern-keeper’s prediction—Lord Alesmere—Patrick Murray of Cherrytrees—Michael Lumsden—Lord Elchies—Countess Dowager of Northesk—Dr. Monro (tertius)—Lords Ellick and Braxfield.

COVENANT CLOSE, an uninviting *cul-de-sac*, situated on the south side of High Street, midway between Parliament Square and Hunter Square, has undergone very little change in modern times.<sup>1</sup> But the houses were formerly peopled with very different tenants from those of to-day, for nearly the whole district once had its narrow wynds and closes teeming with fashionable life, and with men eminent in law and science. The transition from peer to plebeian, from royal to gutter

<sup>1</sup> Covenant Close houses were built about 1600, and the title-deeds of Covenant House (No. 2) show that so recently as the middle of last century the close was called “Burnet’s Close or Covenant Close.” Although the neighbourhood was scheduled by the Chambers City Improvement Scheme, the authorities, after removing a house of five or six storeys on the east side of this close, abandoned their project on account of the expense already incurred.

blood, has been remarkably rapid. The rooms in Covenant Close, little more than a century ago occupied by a Countess and a Lord Provost with royal blood in his veins, are to-day the abode of squalor, while the quiet mansions of noted Senators of the College of Justice have been turned into noisome dens.

As a practical reminder of a stirring epoch in Scottish ecclesiastical history, when the halter and the Maiden almost daily thinned the ranks of the clergy, Covenant Close, among all the landmarks in the city, has an interest peculiarly its own. The circumstances leading to the subscribing of the National Covenant in Greyfriars' Churchyard in 1638; the exciting scrambles for precedence when more signatures were sought in the streets; and the enthusiasm of the country folk in using their own blood for ink,—all these are familiar to our readers. Gordon of Rothiemay says that such ministers as spoke for the Covenant "were heard so passionately and with such frequency, that churches could not contain their hearers in cities; some of the devouter sex (as if they kept vigils) keeping their seats from Friday to Sunday, to get communion given them sitting; some handmaids sitting in the churches all night till their mistresses came to take up their places." Most of the sermons of the day had for their subject "The Broken Covenant." In his *Reminiscences of Scottish Life and Character*, Dean Ramsay tells the story of a clergyman who had held forth on this topic until his people longed for

a change. The elders waited upon him to intimate their wish. They were examined on their knowledge of the subject, found deficient, rebuked, and dismissed, but after a little while they returned to the charge and the minister gave in. Next Lord's Day he read a large portion of the history of Joseph and his brethren as the subject of a lecture. He paraphrased it, greatly, no doubt, to the detriment of the original, but much to the satisfaction of his people, for it was something new. He finished the paraphrase. "And now, my friends," said he, "we shall proceed to draw some lessons and inferences. First, you will observe that the sacks of Joseph's brethren were 'ripped,' and in them was found the cup; so your sacks will be ripped at the Day of Judgment, and the first thing found in them will be the broken Covenant;" and having gained this advantage, the sermon went off into the usual strain, and embodied the usual heads of elementary dogmatic theology.

The first signature appended to the Act of the General Assembly relating to the most noted of all our National Covenants—the international agreement of 1643—was that of "Ja. Primrose," one of the ancestors of Lord Rosebery. Unlike the former Covenant, which was written on parchment, this document was printed on paper with the following title: "A Solemn League and Covenant for Reformation and Defence of Religion, Honour, and Happiness of the King and the Peace and Safety of the three King-

doms of Scotland, England, and Ireland. Edinburgh: Printed by Evan Tyler, Printer to the King's Most Excellent Majestie, 1643." Blank leaves had on each page "The Subscribers of the League and Covenant." The most interesting copy now in existence—printed by Robert Bryson—was signed at Newbattle, and is in the Library of the Society of Antiquaries. It bears the signatures of the Earl of Lothian, Robert Leighton, minister, afterwards Bishop of Dunblane, and the parishioners, for "all his Majesty's good subjects" had to sign under civil penalties as well as Church censures.

After an interval of five years the state of the country led the Commission of the General Assembly and the Committee of Estates in October 1648 to pass Acts ordaining the Solemn League and Covenant, after a public humiliation, to be renewed throughout the kingdom. Copies were accordingly reprinted after the original model. One of this edition, signed by "Mr. James Hamilton, moderator," and about ninety others, ministers and elders, apparently at a meeting of the Commission of the General Assembly, held on the 11th April 1649, is still in existence. Another of the copies seems to have found its way to a house at the south end of Covenant Close, occupied by a wealthy burgher wright named John Hamilton. As John bore the surname of the Assembly Moderator, there is a likelihood that the two were connected by family ties. At any rate like feelings animated them, the



Hamiltons being noted for adherence to the Covenant—indeed all of their name signed the first document. There was therefore probably more of design than of accident in the selection of this meeting-place for the faithful. Concerning Hamilton himself we have found absolutely nothing further than that he built the whole of Covenant Close, and that his public spirit was recognised by his appointment as captain in the trained bands.

Covenant House occupies the ground flat of a five-storey tenement. It is described as consisting of "six fire-rooms and a lobby and a long room on the north which is entered through the kitchen."<sup>1</sup> The long room is probably specially mentioned lest it should be overlooked, for it has what seems to have been a secret door. The apartment itself, even in broad daylight, is dark and dingy, being dependent for light upon a single tiny window having its lower sash filled in with wood, and opening into a built-over section of Burnet's Close.

For the greater part of a century Covenant House was used as a tavern, and in this room, doubtless, many social gatherings took place by candle-light;<sup>2</sup> indeed it has all the appearance of one of the numerous retreats in the narrow closes and wynds where oysters and porter were enjoyed without interruption by the lords and ladies of last

<sup>1</sup> Title-deeds in Council Chambers.

<sup>2</sup> "No idle ornaments; no sculpture or painting. A few solitary tallow candles."—Description of an oyster-cellar, chap. xvi. in Topham's *Letters from Edinburgh*, 1774-75.

century. These suppers, attended by both sexes, were not unalloyed scenes of pleasure, a fear of the power of the devil and a dread of the Deity being predominant feelings of the age,<sup>1</sup>—feelings that would doubtless have great force when a social evening was spent in a tavern with such peculiar associations as those of Covenant House. In the “long room” before mentioned, says tradition, the Solemn League and Covenant was renewed—a ceremony disregarded by the Church of Scotland

<sup>1</sup> “In winter, when the evening had set in, a party of the most fashionable people in town, collected by appointment, would adjourn in carriages to one of those abysses of darkness and comfort called in Edinburgh *laigh shops*, where they proceeded to regale themselves with raw oysters and porter, arranged in huge dishes upon a coarse table, in a dingy room lighted by tallow candles. . . . Both ladies and gentlemen indulged, without restraint, in sallies the merriest and the wittiest; and a thousand remarks and jokes, which elsewhere would have been suppressed as improper, were here sanctified by the oddity of the scene, and appreciated by the most dignified and refined. After the table was cleared of the oysters and porter, it was customary to introduce brandy or rum-punch—according to the pleasure of the ladies—after which dancing took place; and when the female part of the assemblage thought proper to retire, the gentlemen again sat down, or adjourned to another tavern, to crown the pleasures of the evening with an unlimited debauch. . . . The ladies would sometimes have the oyster-women to dance in the ball-room, though they were known to be of the worst character.”—Chambers’s *Traditions of Edinburgh*. During the first half of the present century the oyster-rooms in Shakespeare Square—the site of the east portion of the General Post-Office—were a favourite resort of theatre-goers. In one refreshment bar nearly 10,000 of these toothsome dainties were often sold in a single week.

since 1690, but faithfully observed by the Original Seceders until this century was well advanced. The panelled walls are pierced with queer-looking presses and closets that would have made admirable hiding-places for fugitives; possibly, in view of the troublous times, they were specially designed for that purpose. Most of the apartments in Covenant House were once decorated with paintings and beautiful oak mantels.

Towards the close of last century a proposal to erect a wright's shop at the back of Covenant House led to a curious discussion in the Dean of Guild Court. The respondents, who in a flattering mood likened the Dean of Guild to a Roman *ædile*, objected to the petition because in 1758 several houses in Carrubber's Close had been destroyed by fire begun in a wright's shop; that numerous other disasters originated in a like place; and that nothing was more disturbing than that a neighbourhood "should live hourly under the dreadful apprehension of devouring flames."<sup>1</sup> The wright's shop was built, and, along with Covenant Close, was passed over by the great fire of 1824. Covenant Close had also come scathelessly through the equally destructive fire of 1700. Indeed these houses so frequently escaped destruction when all around was wrecked that some colour was given to the old-fashioned superstition that "they wadna burn."

It was popularly believed that two great fires in Edinburgh had been sent as a divine punishment for the rough treatment the Covenant had received.

<sup>1</sup> Town Council Muniments.

These fires commenced in the land in Meal Market belonging to Bailie Thomas Robertson, who had handed copies of the Covenant to the hangman to be burned at the Market Cross. This ceremony took place in presence of the Lord Provost and Magistrates, on a specially constructed stage.<sup>1</sup>

Elizabeth Wast, in her *Memoirs, or Spiritual Exercises*, published in 1733, records that after the burning of the Covenant the bailie had never the use of his hand. "And now God in His providence hath sent a burning among his lands, so that that which was eleven years in building was not six hours in burning; notwithstanding this he was a good man, and lamented to his death the burning of the Covenant; he was also very helpful to the Lord's prisoners during the late persecution; yet it was well observed by one 'as burning was the sin, so burning was the punishment.' It was observed," she continues, "that as the fire began in his land who burnt the Covenant, so it never rested till it came to the place where it was burnt, and there it stayed without any cause whatsoever. . . . O the burnt Covenant! O the burnt Covenant!"

<sup>1</sup> The Magistrates of Edinburgh erected a stage at the Cross and attended in their robes, and ordered the hangman to burn the declaration published at Lanark (January 1682), together with the Solemn League and Covenant, upon which they said in a paper they printed that the declaration was founded, and fined the town of Lanark 6000 merks because they did not hinder the publishing of it.—Document in Town Council Muniments.

she exclaims, "this is come upon us for burning the Covenant." Less imaginative observers would have said that the fire stopped at the Market Cross because there were no more houses to be consumed.

Mrs. Martin, the venerable landlady of Covenant Close Tavern, towards the middle of last century, used to tell her customers that, according to a prediction generally believed, although Bailie Robertson's house had been twice burned, it was, long after his death, destined yet another time to suffer the same fate. The old tavern-keeper's prediction was practically verified by the fire of 1824.<sup>1</sup>

The tavern in Covenant House was carried on till forty years ago. From the High Street little more than the door could be seen at the end of the long and narrow close, but the proprietor was a Highlander, with a true instinct for turning in a bawbee. Naturally uninviting, the close looked cosiness itself through his simple device of keeping within sight of the door a great roaring fire. Seen from the High Street on the long winter evenings, the warm genial blaze was both striking and attrac-

<sup>1</sup> Bailie Robertson was the enterprising citizen who erected the gigantic houses on the east and south sides of Parliament Close. Hence the inscription on his tomb: "The adorer, if not the builder, of the city." He died in 1686, and was buried near Old Greyfriars' Church, against the west gable of which a fine monument was raised to his memory. His relentless nemesis followed him to the grave, for in 1718 the old church was the scene of a gunpowder explosion that wrecked the western gable, and in 1845 the church was gutted by fire.

tive. We are not aware Burns ever visited this tavern. Seeing it was such a prominent object, there is a possibility that he did; and that he there obtained inspiration for his lines on the "Solemn League and Covenant."<sup>1</sup>

Readers of *Redgauntlet* may remember that in crossing the Solway Firth, Nanty Ewart introduces Covenant Close, along with bits of personal history, to Alan Fairford. Speaking of his father, Nanty says: "But he might have been the wiser man had he kept me at home, when he sent me, at nineteen, to study divinity at the head of the highest stair in Covenant Close. It was a cursed mistake in the old gentleman." Further on he observes: "I had always thought of putting things to rights in Covenant Close and reconciling myself to my father." The "land" to which Nanty was sent adjoins the Covenant House, and had once a crow-stepped gable that formed a conspicuous feature viewed from the south, being seven or eight storeys high, and towering far above its neighbours. The highest and lowest flats were generally tenanted by artificers, while better sort of people dwelt in the fifth and sixth storeys.<sup>2</sup>

This custom once led a Scottish gentleman into a ludicrous mistake. Upon taking the uppermost

<sup>1</sup> The Solemn League and Covenant  
Cost Scotland blood and Scotland tears,  
But it secured fair freedom's cause—  
If thou'rt a slave indulge thy sneers.

<sup>2</sup> Topham's *Letters from Edinburgh*, 1774-75.

storey of a lodging-house in London, he was surprised to find what he thought the most "genteel" place offered at the lowest price. His friends who came to see him in vain acquainted him with his mistake. "He kenned vera weel," said he, "what gentility was, and when he had lived a' his life in a sixth storey he wasna gaun to London to live upon the ground." Many people, indeed, preferred a little dark confined room on a sixth storey to the convenience of a whole house in the new town.

Most unapproachable were Covenant Close houses in early days. On the east they opened into Burnet's Close; on the west into Conn's; while from High Street there seemed to be no entrance whatever. Conn's Close, named after a wealthy flesher, who lived in the beginning of the sixteenth century, commences at Cowgate, and leads to a quaint archway to the west of Covenant Close. Of Conn's Close there is, it may be said in passing, absolutely nothing of interest known beyond a single incident that occurred this century.

At the great fire of 1824 a veteran soldier, named John M'Donald, aged one hundred and nine, lay in bed and, notwithstanding rapidly-approaching danger, pleaded that he should not be disturbed. Ignoring his request, however, a married daughter, named Fraser, courageously took him on her back, and with almost superhuman strength carried him to a place of safety. This family were particularly unfortunate, having been twice burned out.

To the south of Conn's Close archway is an underground passage, with a range of those immense cellars which long ago were attached to the better class of houses, for the storage of the winter's supply of heather, wood, and peat. Less fortunately-situated people, of course, piled their fuel in any place that was handy. Some of the cellars have a fireplace,



CONN'S CLOSE—SPOT WHERE THREE MEN WERE CRUSHED TO DEATH IN 1824—FROM ENGRAVINGS PUBLISHED BY THE RELIEF COMMITTEE

others a window—none have both, although it is said they have all served to house the wretched poor when the authorities were less vigilant than now. This pitch-dark underground passage, which we explored in the company of a detective by the light of a lantern, passes below the houses of three separate closes. For about twenty years it has been shut to the public, but being an aristocratic neighbourhood's short cut to the Assembly Rooms, it must have been



trodden for years last century by scores of the gayest in town.

The solitary "land" in Covenant Close taps this subterranean passage mid-way. Here we have many evidences of two centuries' reign of "fashion and beauty." A range of ten windows in each storey indicates the vast accommodation of the "lodgings"; while a magnificent scale stair, massive oak doors, and rusty fragments of tirling pins, testify to the quality of the original occupants. From the fifth flat a view is obtained of a grotesque head and face surmounting one of the windows near the roof of the Covenant House. At one time the frowning features were easily discernible from the close; now they are traced only upon careful inspection at a distance of a few yards.

The decorative proclivities of Old Edinburgh folk are admirably exemplified here. In almost every apartment there have been oil paintings on the panelled walls—generally over one of those magnificent oak mantelpieces, of which so few examples remain. Of course only one or two of the pictures have come down to us in fairly good condition, but considering the destructive propensities of the tenants, the real wonder, perhaps, is that any at all have been preserved.

The remains of what seems to have been an oratory may still be found in each "lodging." This narrow-windowed retreat was reserved for the use of the master of the house for devotional purposes, seemingly in literal obedience to the injunction, "Thou,

when thou prayest enter into thy closet." The Jews usually built their place of secret devotion over the porch, but in the Edinburgh houses in which we have seen evidences of this ancient practice, the oratories were entered from one of the principal rooms.



A WINDOW IN COVENANT CLOSE.

The pictures and carving in Covenant Close prepare one for the title-deed information that the seventeenth and eighteenth century occupants moved in the upper circles of society.<sup>1</sup> If eminent bankers,

<sup>1</sup> There was, however, a strange mixture of classes at the beginning of last century. In 1708 the *Edinburgh Courant* announced that "all sorts of dead cloathes of wool for men and girls ready made after the British fashion, as also suits for persons of quality, sheets and pillows," were to be obtained at a house in Covenant Close. The same state of matters prevailed in other parts of the town. In the trial of the Porteous Rioters the libel of His Majesty's Advocate said that William M'Lachlan had that night gone "from my Lady Wemyss' house to John Lamb's alehouse on the same stair."

lawyers, and judges were enticed to these quarters in the hope of finding needful quiet for laborious study, they must have been woefully disappointed. In front, at their very door, was stationed a popular tavern, the scene doubtless of many an orgie ; behind stood the Assembly Room, from whence were wafted the indistinguishable strains of hautboy and fiddle. Could it, we wonder, have been some disgusted judge, distracted by a meaningless jumble of sounds while he was penning a note upon an intricate lawsuit, who broke out in the following poetical anathema ?—

May ye never play in tune  
 In the morning, night, or noon ;  
 May ye ne'er at noon or night  
 Know the wrong end from the right ;  
 May the strings be ever breaking !  
 Pegs, I charge ye, ne'er unscrew !  
 May your heads be always aching  
 Till the fiddles break in two !<sup>1</sup>

A distinguished orator and dignified judge, rejoicing in the name of Alemore, lived, perhaps appropriately enough, on the first flat above the tavern.<sup>2</sup> Lord Alemore was in 1757 elevated to the bench on the death of Sir James Fergusson of Kilkerran, whom he also succeeded as Lord of Justiciary. Upon Alemore's death at Hawkhill the *Scots Magazine* remarked that "his decisions were the result of deliberate consideration founded on

<sup>1</sup> "A Catch to a Company of Bad Fiddle Scrapers," *Edinburgh Courant*, August 1780.

<sup>2</sup> Chambers's *Remarkable Fires*.

law tempered with equity, and his opinions were delivered with such an easy flow of eloquence, and with such a dignity of expression as captivated every hearer."

Patrick Murray of Cherrytrees possessed the floor above Lord Alesmere.<sup>1</sup> His house seems to have been artistically decorated, and two pictures on small panels are happily still in a good state of preservation. This may be due to their situation, as they are close to the door, and not greatly exposed to the light. One is a sea-scape with an island and ruined castle; the other a loch with a boat lazily floating on its placid surface. In the forefront are two lovers, but the figures, like many others in old houses, are somewhat clumsy. An elaborate mantelpiece, having an Ionic capital, with regular architrave, rounded frieze, moulded cornice, and fluted pilasters, was removed for preservation during our visit, there being reason to fear that people in the neighbourhood would dismantle the empty house for firewood. The mantelpiece, which eventually found a place in the Council Museum, was thickly coated with paint, but a little scraping and rubbing imparted a beautiful polish to the oak. In another part of the building a closet, the door of which had been nailed for an indefinite period, was at our instigation forcibly entered, and found to contain a gigantic Ali Baba jar, bearing upon its side the figures of two characteristic-looking Scotsmen. As this jar was supposed to have

<sup>1</sup> Title-deeds in City Archives.

been the shop sign of the famous snuff-manufacturer Gillespie, it was touched up by the decorator and now adorns the Council Museum staircase.

The mention of the Cherrytrees family recalls a curious tradition about the saintly minister of St. Cuthbert's—Rev. David Williamson. One evening in 1674, after he had been denounced as a rebel for holding conventicles, Williamson is said to have unceremoniously claimed the protection of two of Lady Cherrytrees' daughters, who had retired for the night—there being no other possible way of escape from his pursuers. One of these young ladies he subsequently married. This reputed incident gained for the clergyman the nickname "Dainty Davie," after the original version of the song bearing that name,<sup>1</sup> but with greater truth he might have been called the Scottish Bluebeard, for he married seven wives, among whom one of the young Cherrytrees came third in point of order.<sup>2</sup> Upon being sent by the Church to congratulate King William on his accession, this venerable clergyman is said to have

<sup>1</sup> The idea that the original version of "Dainty Davie" was composed to celebrate Williamson's escapade is entirely erroneous. This song, Mr. John Glen assures us, was written long before that time.

<sup>2</sup> *Fasti Ecclesie Scoticanæ*, under the article "St. Cuthbert's," gives the following particulars concerning Williamson's wives: "1, Issobell Lyndsay, who died March 1665, and had William. 2, Margaret Scott, and had Margaret. 3, —, daughter to Murray of Cherrytrees. 4, Margaret Melwing, died Oct. 1692. 5, Margaret Dugall, and had David. 6, — —. 7, 10th May 1700, Jean Straiton."

attracted much notice from the ladies of the Court on account of his matrimonial alliances. Williamson was notable also for being the first minister known to possess a watch.

A marginal note with reference to Dainty Davie occurs in the manuscript records of the Town Council for 24th February 1699. At that time the minister of St. Cuthbert's received a donation of 200 merks on behalf of "the begging poor" in the parish. The pencilled marginal note, in handwriting different from that of the minute, and dated 1793, mentions that the reverend gentleman was "father of the present Williamson, Town Clerk," and then records the story of his rough wooing. The son referred to was Mr. Joseph Williamson, advocate, who died two years later, in 1795. He had been a long and faithful servant of the town, and in the memorable '45 refused to deliver up the keys of the city even to the Lord Provost. A peremptory command having been given, he implored that he might be at least permitted to escape over the walls so as not to share in the general disgrace of the city.

From this pardonable digression we return to Covenant Close, and continue our ascent of the broad "scale" staircase as far as the fourth flat, where in one of the apartments will be found an artistic cupboard having a clam-shell top surmounted by a grotesque head. This house was seemingly very popular with the legal profession.

For a time it was the residence of Michael Lumsden, advocate,<sup>1</sup> whose grandfather, father, and brother were ministers of Duddingston. Of Lumsden himself little is known, but his grandfather was presented to Duddingston by James VI. in 1611, and in the same year received 50 merks from the Town Council of Edinburgh "for his paynes and travell in examination of the north-west quarter sen March last to 1st November." Patrick Grant (Lord Elchies), when a rising member of the Scottish bar, also stayed here at the beginning of last century.<sup>2</sup> The extent of his practice may be judged by the size of his private establishment, for he "joined the third and fourth flats by a door or communication struck out betwixt them internally, so that the whole lodging consisted of nine rooms and closets, with two places for lumber and two cellars." These must have been pretty good times for lawyers if many traders resembled the Edinburgh merchant who thought nothing of "employing eight lawyers each session and printing several thousand sheets of paper, besides paying heavy fees to the Supreme Court," for the satisfaction of prosecuting a fraudulent bankrupt.<sup>3</sup>

Lord Elchies lived in Covenant Close until his elevation to the bench in 1732, when he removed to another neighbourhood. After worthily occupying the bench for twenty-two years he died at Inch House,

<sup>1</sup> Title-deeds in City Archives.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Town Council Muniments.

“leaving behind him,” says the *Scots Magazine*, “the character of an honest man, a sincere friend, an able lawyer, a disinterested judge, and a zealous well-wisher of our present happy Constitution.” The voluminous notes of decisions by Lord Elchies have been found very serviceable to successive generations of lawyers.

A suite of six rooms on the fourth flat was subsequently occupied by the Countess Dowager of Northesk,<sup>1</sup> widow of David, the fourth Earl—a Representative Peer, who died in 1729. This lady’s grandson, William, seventh Earl, distinguished himself as an Admiral third in command at the battle of Trafalgar. The only other notable that succeeded the Countess was Dr. Monro (tertius),<sup>2</sup> grandson of the eminent anatomist and founder of the Medical School of Edinburgh. In 1777 we find Dr. Monro petitioning the Town Council for a new commission describing him Professor of Anatomy and Surgery in place of simply Professor of Anatomy. Annexed to the petition is a state of the number of students of anatomy and surgery from 1717 to 1777, the total being 8493; computing “each student to have expended £60 yearly, the total sum expended by them exceeds half a million sterling.”<sup>3</sup> With Monro’s death at Craiglockhart ended the connection between the College of Edinburgh and the family of Monro, which had lasted for more than a hundred

<sup>1</sup> Title-deeds in City Chambers.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Town Council Muniments.



and twenty-five years. Monro's grandchildren owned the house in Covenant Close until the beginning of this century.

One of the upper flats in Covenant Close was jointly occupied by Messrs. Veitch and Macqueen, the Lords Elliock and Braxfield of later years.<sup>1</sup> Shortly after his admission to the bar in 1738, Elliock visited the Continent, and when in Germany was introduced to Frederick the Great, King of Prussia. With this illustrious monarch he became a great favourite, and upon returning to Edinburgh had the honour of corresponding with him, the letters probably being written in this quaint old close. Brunton and Haig observe that Elliock was "endowed with mental abilities of the first order, and was generally allowed to be one of the most accomplished scholars of his time."

Lord Braxfield (Robert Macqueen of Braxfield) was much less refined than his fellow-lodger—indeed even among the judges of the old school he stands out as coarse and almost brutal. Yet he attained to great eminence in his profession, and was said to have made more money at the bar than any counsel before him. His great abilities came first to be known by the intricate and important feudal questions arising out of the forfeitures of 1745, at which time he was Lord Justice Clerk. Lord Cockburn gives this judge a terrible character. Braxfield, he says, "was a profound practical lawyer

<sup>1</sup> Chambers's *Remarkable Fires*.

and a powerful man ; coarse and illiterate ; of debauched habits, and of grosser talk than suited the taste even of his gross generation ; utterly devoid of judicial decorum. . . . Over the five weak men who sat beside him this coarse and dexterous ruffian predominated as he chose. He had the skill to conceal his influence by making what he wished to be said or done by his brethren, but everybody who understood the scene knew whose mind was operating. 'Bring me the prisoners and I will find you law,' was said to be his common answer to his friends, the accusers, when he learned that they were hesitating. . . . Except civil and Scotch law, and probably two or three works of indecency, it may be doubted if he ever read a book in his life." To an eloquent culprit Braxfield's memorable remark was, "Man, you're a very clever chiel, but I'm thinking ye wad be nane the waur o' a hangin'." The broad Scotch in which the old judge always indulged led to a well-deserved rebuke from the political prisoner, Margarot. "Hae ye ony coonsel, man?" he inquired. "No," was the reply. "Div ye want to hae ony appinted?" "No," replied Margarot, who was an Englishman, "I only want an interpreter to make me understand what your lordship says."

Dean Ramsay mentions that a prisoner, accused of stealing some linen garments, was one day brought up for trial, but was acquitted because the prosecutor had charged him with stealing shirts,

whereas the articles stolen were found to be shifts—female apparel. Braxfield indignantly remarked that the Crown counsel should have called them by the Scottish name of sarks, which applied to the apparel of both sexes.

## LEAVES FROM AN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY LORD PROVOST'S DIARY

Steuarts of Dalguise—Lord Provost David Steuart—Social condition of Edinburgh—A peep into the Council House—The American war panic—Admiral of the Firth of Forth—Arranging convoys—Freedom of Edinburgh to naval commanders—Unique gold box—Edinburgh Defensive Band—Steuart and the Trained Bands—Anti-Roman Catholic riots—Town Council and church music—Tron Bass Club—Church seat quarrels—Professor Robertson and Dr. Blair's applications—Friendly relations with the Yorkshire Committee—Parliamentary election squabble—Treasurer of the Royal Bank.

IN the latter half of last century the Steuarts of Dalguise, of whom one was Lord Provost of Edinburgh, and another Treasurer of the Bank of Scotland, lived on the sixth storey of a house in Covenant Close.<sup>1</sup> At that period Edinburgh was awakening from prolonged lethargy. The new town

<sup>1</sup> Title-deeds in Council Chambers. The progenitor of this family was Sir John Steuart of Cardney, a son of King Robert II. Their estate, which is picturesquely situated on the western bank of the Tay, in the Athole district of Perthshire, was nearly confiscated through the seventh laird—father of the Lord Provost—having taking a prominent part in the rebellion of 1715.

had sprung up, poverty and despondency had given place to prosperity and gaiety, and above all, literature, long neglected, was in the ascendancy.

Lord Provost David Steuart came of a Perthshire family that had been long and honourably connected with Edinburgh, and he himself took part in the management of the city's affairs during a stirring time when events occurred that were unique in local history. Besides the excitement over the war with the American colonies, and the alarm arising from the threatened invasion by the Scottish renegade Paul Jones, there were memorable anti-Catholic riots, and a serious mutiny among the Castle garrison—all demanding unusual activity on the part of the civic authorities. Nor was there much to boast about the social condition of Edinburgh. In 1780 an umbrella attracted almost as much notice as a bicycle does to-day in China; sedan chairs, of which there were 188, were still the favourite means of conveyance from one house to another;<sup>1</sup> and no merchant did business after dinner—that of itself having become a very serious matter. The simplicity of the times had a counterpart in the Council House, which was “a low-roofed room, very dark and very dirty, with some small dens off it for clerks. Within this pandemonium sat the Town Council, omnipotent, corrupt, impenetrable. Nothing was

<sup>1</sup> Lord Provost Steuart in 1781 proposed “that three hackney coaches should ply in the new town stand on Sunday for carrying the inhabitants to church.”

beyond its grasp; no variety of opinion disturbed its unanimity. . . . Reporters, the fruit of free discussion, did not exist, and though they had existed, would not have dared to disclose the proceedings. Silent, powerful, submissive, mysterious, and irresponsible, they might have been sitting in Venice.”<sup>1</sup>

When war with the American colonies was threatened the town raised in one year—1778—a regiment of 1000 men to aid the Government. Many of the soldiers belonged to the poorer classes, and left their wives and children unprovided for. The nurses of the city foundlings were described as mostly “poor, indigent wretches in whose hands great numbers of these innocent children are starved to death or die for want of air, not to say worse of it.” On the Kirk Treasurer’s list were usually “thirty foundlings—then, allowing one-third of that number to die before they are four years of age (which allowance ’tis believed is even too great with respect to children in general), it follows that twenty of them should annually go to the poorhouse; but it will be found on inquiry, and a sad truth it is, that one year with another there have not been sent to the poorhouse above four or five of them.” The Kirk Treasurer suggested “that instead of suckling they should be brought up with the pan and spoon, it being well known that numbers of children in England of good fashion are brought up in this

<sup>1</sup> *Memorials of his Time*, by Lord Cockburn.

manner, and do as well as others who are suckled.”<sup>1</sup> The contractor for lighting the city was brought to the verge of bankruptcy by the unexpected turn in the political situation, “for,” as he ingenuously put it, “when he took the contract there was no just ground to believe that Great Britain would have been involved in war, nor that the price of oil should have so rapidly risen.”<sup>2</sup>

In the way of arranging convoys for trading vessels the Admiral of the Firth of Forth had ample scope for his energies. A graphic description of the difficulties occasionally experienced has come to light. The Lord Provost had promised that a convoy would sail from Leith about the beginning of May 1779, but unforeseen hitches arose, and the owners and shipmasters had to remind him in the middle of the month about his still unfulfilled promise. Thirty or forty vessels were ready to start, but no ship of war had yet appeared, and his lordship was asked to procure an immediate convoy. But patience was further tested, and when at length Captain Collins, Commander of H.M.S. *Alfred*, sailed from Leith Roads with the traders, “the convoy were very much dispersed owing to their not paying due attention to his signals.” The result was that the Commander could only collect twenty-five of the vessels during the passage. On arrival at his destination, however, he found them all safe except a Dysart brig, which was taken by a French privateer “mounting 14 pounders and 80 men.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Town Council Muniments.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

Many vessels were pounced upon between the Bass and the Isle of May, and substantial ransoms claimed. When the scare was at its height Lord Haddington intimated to the Town Council that an Anti-Gallican Society had been formed "to promote the internal defence of the kingdom at this critical period," and that prizes would be offered to the best marksmen in the Town Train Band.<sup>1</sup>

Proposals were also made concerning what appeared to be most necessary to render the city wall tenable for some days against an enemy unprovided with artillery.

Many of the distinguished naval officers who took part in the American war had municipal honours showered upon them by a grateful community. In 1781 Admiral Parker's fleet and 600 merchantmen, with a total crew of 20,000, lay for nearly two months in Leith Roads, and the Council took the opportunity of making the Admiral and eleven of his captains burgesses of the town.<sup>2</sup> The freedom of Edinburgh was also conferred upon Admiral Sir George Brydges Rodney, who had gained numerous victories, and eventually brought about the Peace of Versailles. The gold box containing his burghess ticket had an elegantly engraved cover "exhibiting a south view of Edinburgh, comprehending part of the Castle; the lady supporter holding in her right hand the Castle and Anchor, with her left presenting the freedom of the city to the Admiral, who was

<sup>1</sup> Town Council Muniments.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*



represented in the middle of the cover. Over the Admiral's head was Victory descending with a laurel in the right hand to crown him, and in the left the British standard displayed. A view of the Firth, with the vessels, likewise the houses from the Castle Hill; a view of the north hills, Inchkeith; and, opposite St. Giles' spire, the walk leading up from the Meadow, entering the town by the gate in the wall. St. Giles' spire, the houses down to the Tron Church, with its spire; the houses down to where the Netherbow stood; also the spire of the new Episcopal Chapel; and in the south-east corner of the cover some thistles and stalks with their leaves. The cover bordered with bays and roses."<sup>1</sup> Truly a gorgeous gift. Through the courtesy of the City Chamberlain, we learn that the total cost amounted to £46:4s., made up thus—"To James Hewitt, goldsmith, for a gold box for Admiral Rodney's burgess ticket, £44:2s.; to William Davie for making a design for do., £2:2s."

For a year or two about 1780 Davie supplied the City's Plate, run for on the sands of Leith, his remuneration, including "engraving the City's arms thereon," being fixed at £50. Seemingly he was an adept at designing and executing presentation plate. In the matter of caskets the Town Council are neither so generous nor so artistically inclined nowadays. Silver gilt presentation caskets are contracted for a fixed sum of £25. The design is uniform, but

<sup>1</sup> *Caledonian Mercury*, March 1781.

subject to slight modifications according to circumstances.

The patriotism of the citizens—so intense at one time that they opened a subscription list for supplying the British troops on the Continent with flannel waistcoats<sup>1</sup>—took a more practical shape during Steuart's civic reign by the formation, on 22nd September 1781, of the Edinburgh Defensive Band—a short-lived organisation that has its memory perpetuated by the Lodge of Freemasons bearing that name. The regiment was composed of gentlemen belonging chiefly to the mercantile and professional bodies, with the Lord Provost as honorary colonel. Headed by their band, which played a special march, the corps must have made a brave show with cocked hat, light blue coat and orange velvet facings, white waistcoat, nankeen breeches, and black leggings.

The first inspection took place under Lord Provost Steuart on Heriot's Hospital Green, when the exercising was praised by the military spectators. A grand display on St. Andrew's Day, 1782, was made the occasion of the presentation of a set of colours by the Town Council. Earlier in the same month—4th November—fifty of the volunteers had formed a lodge of Freemasons under the title of "Edinburgh Defensive Band." Dean of Faculty Andrew Crosbie, the original of Counsellor Pleydell in *Guy Mannering*, was not only Lieutenant-Colonel of the regiment, but first R.W.M. of the Lodge.<sup>2</sup> His portrait may be

<sup>1</sup> City Muniments, 1793.

<sup>2</sup> Minutes of the Lodge.

seen in Parliament Hall. This Lodge—whose members included Daniel Lizars, the well-known engraver—has the reputation of being one of the most prosperous in the city. It still possesses the venerable colours gifted by the Town Council, as well as a musket, bayonets, and belts used by the Defensive Volunteers. Formerly it had among its antiquarian treasures a suit of the original regimentals, but the old relic went amissing when new clothes were ordered for the Edinburgh Exhibition of 1886.

Amusing experiences fall to be recorded in connection with the ancient semi-military institution known as the Trained Bands, with which Steuart in his public capacity was brought in contact. For about two hundred years this organisation was understood to exist solely for the purpose of preserving the peace of the town. The captains met sometimes in each other's houses, but more frequently in taverns, which were indiscriminately patronised.

Whether the Trained Bands were really of much service to the Magistrates does not appear from their ancient records published some time ago by the Town Clerk, but they seem to have had an immense capacity for liquor. This may be gathered from the frequently recurring item for broken glass and china in their tavern bills. While it is known that certain toasts involved the destruction of the drinking-vessel, it is reassuring to learn from the minutes that far from being in that condition in which wanton destruction of property is of no moment, the company generally

separated "in good order and according to their distinct colours."<sup>1</sup> One of the minutes, signed by Steuart as Commandant, relates to a meeting convened by himself for the purpose of securing the assistance of the Trained Bands in dealing with a



EDINBURGH DEFENSIVE VOLUNTEER.

mob that had committed several daring outrages the previous evening, and threatened further mischief. "After sitting a decent time at dinner," says the minute—it would have been incompatible with dignity had they shortened this important function—"the corps sallied forth, armed with oaken bludgeons, to patrol the streets, and by the formidable appearance they made effectually intimi-

<sup>1</sup> Skinner's *Trained Bands*.

dated the mob, and prevented the fatal effects of their mistaken zeal against the Roman Catholics, and thereby prevented much bloodshed, to the great mortification of the promoters of this riot.”<sup>1</sup> These were scenes to which the pen of a Scottish Dickens alone could do justice.

At next meeting of the Trained Bands, when the Lord Provost and Magistrates were entertained “with that elegance, harmony, and good order so peculiar to the Society,” it was observed that several of the corps had, contrary to the regulations, deserted from their stations. As this was “in every respect subversive of that military discipline by which every established corps ought to be governed, the commandant, waiving that power vested in his office, with the consent of the remaining captains, resolved

<sup>1</sup> The *Scots Magazine*, describing this riot, says that notwithstanding the efforts of the Magistrates, the City Guard, and the Duke of Buccleuch with a party of his regiment of Fencibles, a Bishop’s house at the foot of Trunk’s Close was reduced to ashes. Next day the rioters attacked a Roman Catholic house in Blackfriars’ Wynd, and at night threatened to destroy the house of Principal Robertson, at the University, that gentleman being thought to be favourable to the abolition of the penal laws. A party of Fencibles was, however, posted in the College quadrangle, so that the mob turned their attention to the shops and houses of Roman Catholics in other parts of the city. The dragoons and Fencibles then patrolled the streets, and a few of the rioters were apprehended. This was the evening upon which the Trained Bands sallied forth so valiantly “after sitting a decent time at dinner.” By way of contrast to this anti-Catholic riot we find that exactly a hundred years afterwards—in 1879—the Roman Catholic Cathedral, in Broughton Street, was opened with great pomp.

that any captain deserting from his duty, without permission asked and granted from the commandant or major, should be fined *ipso facto* one guinea." Several fines, including one of a bottle of wine, were imposed during the evening. It was about this period that Adam Smith, author of *The Wealth of Nations*, and Hugo Arnot, author of *The History of Edinburgh*, were admitted into membership.

The mutiny in the Earl of Seaforth's Regiment, which declined to proceed to India without receiving arrears of pay, was even more sensational than the riots. Loading their muskets and fixing their bayonets, the men attacked the officers on the Esplanade, and then marched to Arthur Seat, where they received food from the friendly inhabitants. Fortunately, after holding out for two days, the mutineers surrendered without shedding a drop of blood. The remains of the breastwork they formed on the hill can, it is said, still be distinctly traced. Turbulent though the times were, some attention was paid to literature, the Royal Society being established in 1783, and the famous Mirror Club in 1799. Education, however, seems to have been lightly esteemed, for in 1781 the four "established teachers of English" had (exclusive of fees) only £15 each per annum.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In a petition to the Town Council "for augmentation of salary, or to be provided with teaching rooms at the public expense," these teachers, who of course were unconnected with the High School, state that they had to lay out the whole of the £15, and sometimes more, on house rent, while they were bound by Act of Council to teach for 5s. per quarter, which was

Ecclesiastical matters always commanded an extraordinary amount of civic attention. Judging from numerous fragmentary documents, the building of a church, such as St. Andrew's, in the eighteenth century, involved a mental strain upon the Corporation even greater than their anxiety manifested for the domestic comfort of the city's great minister, John Knox, in the sixteenth century. Nor need this occasion surprise when it is recollected that minister, beadle, and precentor alike owed their appointments to this august body. In prosecution of a scheme for psalmody improvement, the Council engaged a Durham musician, "well skilled in theory and practice," to teach gratuitously in seven schools not only beginners, but the staid precentors themselves.<sup>1</sup> This was in Lord Provost Drummond's time. The scheme grew until 1781, when it reached the stage at which a choir dispute developed—the earliest recorded in local history. Discontentment broke out in the "Tron Bass Club," as it was called, and the precentor kept his singers together only "with much

only half the charge of the other English teachers in the city. The teacher of the free school had £20 per annum without schoolhouse or other emoluments; but he occasionally received a yearly gift of £6 towards meeting his rent.

<sup>1</sup> *Edinburgh Courant*, November 1755 and April 1756, which adds: "The spirit that discovers taste among people of all ranks for this matter is so great as promises that in a short time the psalmody in our churches will be performed in a much more decent manner than formerly. In one of our churches in this city they have now begun to sing every Sunday without reading a line."

difficulty and at great expense." The club consisted of fifteen or sixteen performers, who grumbled at their inadequate pay compared with that of the Bass Club of Old Greyfriars' Church. Fortunately, by raising the quarter's salary from 20s. to 30s. harmony was speedily restored.<sup>1</sup>

Another piece of ecclesiastical work of which Town Councils have now happily got rid, was the half-yearly allocation of seats in the city churches. Arnot says that in 1763 Sunday was strictly observed by all ranks as a day of devotion, and that it was disgraceful to be seen on the streets during the time of public worship. Towards the close of the century, however, attendance on church was much neglected: Sunday was made a day of relaxation; families thought it ungentle to take their domestics to church with them; the streets were crowded in the time of worship, and often riotous at night. Judging from the eagerness with which church seats were sought, it must have been considered still the height of fashion to attend public worship about 1781. But the letting system aroused great dissatisfaction, personal animosities being engendered by unscrupulous persons who used their influence to obtain the seats of their less vigilant neighbours.<sup>2</sup> Mr. Steuart Barclay of Collierney, who resided in Carrubber's Close, seems to have been one of these victims. He

<sup>1</sup> Town Council Muniments.

<sup>2</sup> The illustrations that follow are taken from documents in the City Archives.



“had looked upon himself as sure of a seat in the Tron Church when Baron Norton slipped in and deprived him of it.” Lady Grant had still more ground for annoyance. “The Tron Church,” said she, “was the most commodious for one in her time of life to walk to, her house being within the head of Blackfriars’ Wynd.” But this circumstance had been deemed of no account, for “upon returning from a visit to a friend at a distance she was surprised to find that the seat had been disposed of to another during her absence.” The details of a third case of oppression are given by a widow. Writing to the Cess Office, Mrs. Thomson says: “I am sorry you put me to the trouble to apply to the Council for my seat this year again, as it is nothing but owing to a spiteful man whom I obliged by letting him have a seat for himself and spouse. But that would not satisfy him, as he insisted upon getting the half of my seat, though he has no family, but to oblige his own acquaintance. The seat holds eight people, and I charge half-a-crown a bottom, which I think is no imposition when I divide it in eight parts. But as he is a very troublesome man, and is not in church four times a year himself, but always takes care to send some one in his place, I would not choose to give up my seat on my children’s account.” To the Town Council she sent a concise and pithy letter complaining of “a troublesome man, one Cunningham, a messenger, whom I let have two bottom rooms for himself and

spouse, and this year the messenger insisted upon having one-half of my seat. I think it a pity a man who has come from the uttermost corners of Scotland should get the better of me, who was born and brought up in Edinburgh, and has for seven and twenty years kept a house and paid the town duties." In view of these complaints there is some justification for the merchant's remark in his letter of application that "he was not fond of seats in partnership, for often disagreeable statements occurred."

A numerous family seemed to be an important qualification for applicants. Adam Brooks, dyer, having a fancy for Old Greyfriars, "where he never had a seat which he could with propriety call his own," said that "sometime ago he made an addition to his family, so that the want of a seat in the parish church made attending divine service inconvenient and uncertain." Miss Macpherson and Miss Grindlay, who "kept a school in Carrubber's Close for the purpose of teaching young ladies sewing, tambour work, and other branches of education, and also kept boarders," thought "their honours would perceive that the want of a seat was very inconvenient for persons of their profession." Lady Primrose Lovat cast longing eyes towards the Tron, and felt it was "a point incumbent on herself to know that her servants went to church regularly—a satisfaction of which she had been deprived for some time past." Robert M'Intosh, the musician, "a householder in Edinburgh for sixteen years, was extremely desirous

of having his family accommodated in the Tolbooth"—a church so popular that it was said one might have less difficulty in finding a seat in the House of Commons. The application by John Robertson, Professor of Natural Philosophy, is a somewhat lengthy document. He had given up his seat in Greyfriars on account of its inconvenient distance from his house, and asked for another in the Tron. "He flattered himself the Council would be disposed to grant him this favour, as they were sensible that by so doing they would put it now in his power to answer their intention in calling him into their University." A characteristic application came from Dr. Blair, the eminent divine, three years after he had published his famous sermons. In dignified phraseology he presented his compliments to the Lord Provost, simply adding that he would do himself the honour to wait upon his lordship. Accompanying the letter was a piece of paper with the number of the seat he wanted in the Little Kirk. "I cannot plead any services to the city," says another applicant, "but I have, as indeed I ought to have, a regard for the good town, and a respect for its Magistrates and Council, and have always been willing when it was in my power to show these sentiments."

Some curiosity may be aroused upon finding a very friendly communication addressed to the Town Council by the Association for the County of York. Writing on behalf of the Committee, under date "Burton Hall, near Bedale, 1st November 1782,"

Mr. C. Wyvill suggests what should be done to effect various Parliamentary reforms, and concludes thus: "The Yorkshire Committee having so freely suggested their sentiments on these important matters, do most earnestly entreat the Corporation of Edinburgh with equal freedom to communicate their opinion and advice." An explanation of this unexpected courtesy seems to be that Bailie Dundas of Edinburgh was connected with Yorkshire, for his grandson (son of Sir Lawrence) upon being raised to the peerage took the title of a Yorkshire estate. The Town Council, needless to say, reciprocated the good feelings of their English friends.

The amusing way in which the civic fathers encouraged the movement for removal of the old Slaughter Houses at the Nor' Loch side may also be recorded. Strenuous opposition having been threatened by the Incorporation of Fleshers, who addressed their brethren on "the hardships of the situation," the Town Council fortified their application for Parliamentary powers by obtaining the testimony not only of the Royal Colleges of Physicians and Surgeons, but of the Society of the Writers to the Signet. These bodies declared that "as the Slaughtering Houses were placed between the Old and New Town, their situation, which was low and moist, tended to promote putrefaction," and that they were "noxious to those in the neighbourhood and to all other inhabitants."<sup>1</sup> This was in 1783,

<sup>1</sup> Town Council Muniments.

and yet the buildings objected to remained within sight of the Council Chambers until 1844.

Political feeling ran very high in 1780, with the result that the Town Council was broken up into factions, one of which re-elected Sir Lawrence Dundas, while the other elected Mr. William Miller, younger, of Barskimming (afterwards Lord Glenlee), as member of Parliament for the city. It was in the midst of this turmoil, "after hearing an excellent sermon, which it might have been imagined would have calmed their minds, and in some measure softened the rancour and allayed the spirit of party,"<sup>1</sup> that Steuart was elected to the Provostship, for which there were other two candidates.<sup>2</sup> Sir Lawrence

<sup>1</sup> *Scots Magazine*.

<sup>2</sup> The election of Lord Provost and Magistrates was a very different matter long ago from what it is now, and we have been fortunate enough to come across an official paper dealing with the subject. In itself the document is very interesting, as it refers to the election of the first Lord Provost Drummond immediately after the city's funds, according to Maitland, had fallen into a state of confusion. It is as follows: "Most sacred sovereigne, the obedience we own to your Majesty's commands in what way so ever expressed to us, and the deep sense we have of your Majesty's special care of the good government of this your ancient city, make us very cheerfully comply with your Majesty's pleasure signified to us by the Earl of Middleton, your Secretary, of the 25th of September last past, recommending George Drummond to be the Lord Provost of this city. In pursuance whereof we have (to the general satisfaction of the whole city) made choice of the said George Drummond for our Provost, and have been very careful to elect such persons for bailiffs and other magistrates as your Majesty and the Government may fully confide in, and are disinterested in those

Dundas, it was said, had "given more money to charitable purposes than all the other members of Parliament or candidates for Edinburgh since the Union," but with a sly dig at him for acquiring his fortune as a Commissary-General in the army, his opponents replied that he might well do so, for he had "gained more money by the Edinburgh regiment than he had given or would give to any or all the public charities."<sup>1</sup> Mr. Miller proceeded to London, was presented to their Majesties at St. James's, and succeeded in getting the London mails to Edinburgh accelerated, all to no purpose, for he was unseated on an election petition, and Sir Lawrence was returned.

Steuart had an intimate knowledge of modern

malversations and embezzlements of the city's revenue which is so justly complained of, and who will be very concerned for the good of the city, and just management of the common interest and affairs of the same : And we are resolved seriously to concur in the prosecution of the count and reckoning depending before your Majesty's Treasury and Exchequer for bringing those who have mismanaged and embezzled the common good of this city, and particularly that part thereof which we enjoyed by your Majesty's favour and bounty, to ane just accounting for the same, as being a matter wherein the future tranquillity and happiness of this your good town is so much concerned. And as we are deeply sensible of your Majesty's care of this your ancient city, so we shall endeavour to walk worthy thereof in the due obedience to and careful execution of your Majesty's laws against all the disturbers of the peace of your Government, and shall be ready upon every occasion wherein your royal Majesty's interest, or the interests of your lawful successors, may be concerned with our lives and fortunes to demean ourselves.—29th October 1683."

<sup>1</sup> *Scots Magazine*.

languages, and was passionately fond of literature. He was also an indefatigable book-collector, and two of his treasures were presented to the Advocates' Library—the Roman Breviary, beautifully printed on the finest vellum, at Venice, in 1478, and the first edition of the Latin Bible, in two large folio volumes, one of the earliest books executed from movable types, supposed to have been printed by Guttenburg and Faust in 1450. The Latin Bible may still be seen in the Advocates' Library, but the Breviary is amissing.

A letter written by Steuart, in London, on 18th March 1782, suggests that the Town Council should endeavour to obtain the support of Mr. Hunter Blair, M.P. for the city, on behalf of an application to have "Lieutenant Hotchkiss (the son of our worthy friend Bailie Hotchkiss), who was severely wounded in the defence of his country on board the Preston man-of-war," made a master commander, and expresses the assurance that the Council will do everything in their power to serve "the brave son of a most respectable citizen of Edinburgh, and worthy member of society."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Town Council Muniments. The Town Clerk of the day (Mr. Joseph Williamson, advocate) appears to have had good business habits, and an aversion to destroying documents relating to the city's business. Slips of paper containing the original motions, probably drafted in the dingy Council-House, reports of committees, and petitions, are all carefully preserved, and afford an admirable insight into not only the civic but into the social life of these days. One of the scraps of paper contains a motion endorsed by Bailie (afterwards Lord Provost) Elder, "That the Magistrates of Leith should be provided with a small

In business Steuart had for his partner the father of Thomas Allan, who bought the estate of Lauriston, which had for nearly a century and a half been the property of the representatives of the celebrated John Law. Several interesting relics of the past have been preserved by the Steuarts of Dalguise. The most valuable of these were lent to the Antiquarian Museum—two rare old Highland targets and two venerable harps. One of the harps is said to have belonged to Queen Mary.

Thomas, a brother of Lord Provost Steuart, was Treasurer of the Bank of Scotland,<sup>1</sup> and distinguished himself as inventor of the calculation of interest by decimal arithmetic. His calculations accidentally

gold medal, to be hung by a ribbon from one of their breast button-holes, as a mark of distinction, they being often insulted by sailors, etc., from all countries who are not aware of the Magistrates' authority." The motion was rejected. To this habit of preserving manuscripts we are also indebted for the information that the Council used annually to offer a silver golf club, open to competition between all comers in Great Britain or Ireland, on payment of 5s. entry money. The captains of the Golf Company were of opinion that the competition ought to be restricted to members of their club, "because persons of bad fame and others not fit company for gentlemen" might engage in the competition. "The winner being declared captain, he would have to take the chair and preside at all the golf meetings, which would destroy the intention of the good town, the club being purposely meant to be played for and won by gentlemen and noblemen."

<sup>1</sup> Thomas was appointed Teller in March 1742, Secretary in March 1768, and joint-Treasurer with Mr. Spence in June 1786. He was Treasurer from March 1790 till his death in 1792.



came into the possession of the family some years ago, having been sold along with a bundle of loose pamphlets. "The caligraphy is exceedingly beautiful, very close, but as plain as print. The arrangement of the tables displays much ingenuity, and the entire volume is a splendid monument to the patience of this representative of the house of Dalguise."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hunter's *Woods, Forests, and Estates of Perthshire*.

## BURNET'S CLOSE

A quaint house—Heritors and the Highland cattle—Men of letters who lived in the close—Hugh Blair—Dr. Stevenson—Lord Auchinleck—Sir James Dalrymple—St. Fillan's relic—Scottish cross-houses—Abolition of Trade Incorporation privileges—Presentation to Gulland—Lord Provost Johnston.

BURNET'S CLOSE bears the name of a wealthy brewer, who figured prominently in Edinburgh society about the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth centuries. Samuel Burnet was a contemporary of Jinglin' Geordie, and both their names are appended to a contract between the Magistrates and the Society of Brewers of Ale and Beer, of date 1597.<sup>1</sup> More interest may be felt in the older name borne by Burnet's Close—that of Johnston—on account of the house in which Edward Johnston lived being reckoned the quaintest among the existing Old Edinburgh buildings.<sup>2</sup> Johnston was

<sup>1</sup> City Muniments.

<sup>2</sup> The Register of Sasines for 1596 shows that the house had passed from the late Edward Johnston to various members of his family. For a hundred years it has been in the posses-

the uncle of the last laird of Newby, in Haddingtonshire, and one of the Scottish adventurers for the plantation of Ulster in the reign of James VI.<sup>1</sup> The outstanding features of his house consist in a turreted staircase half scooped out of the wall, and small, irregularly-shaped windows, obviously designed to catch every straggling ray of light that



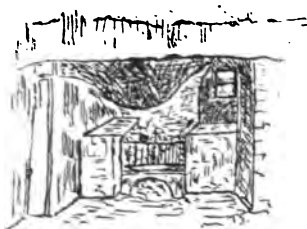
QUAINT HOUSE IN BURNET'S CLOSE.

could possibly penetrate what two centuries ago was a narrow, steep, dingy close. These windows, some of which have the original astragals and glass, are all sizes and shapes, the only point of resemblance being that they are uniformly diminutive. Indeed, one might almost fancy that the window tax, in the payment of which there was all along an "uncommon backwardness,"<sup>2</sup> loomed somewhat largely in the architect's mind. Through placing a window sion of Messrs. Smith and Son, wireworkers, and being for the most part used as a warehouse, it has been well preserved.

<sup>1</sup> Privy Council Records.

<sup>2</sup> *Edinburgh Courant*.

in the kitchen fireplace, an arrangement at once interesting and unique has been made. In the castles and mansions of Scotland, as Messrs. Macgibbon and Ross point out in their valuable work, windows are frequently found in vents and fireplaces, but we are assured that in no instance have they seen one in any part of Scotland in such a tiny fireplace.



KITCHEN FIREPLACE WITH WINDOW.

Regarding its use there seems little dubiety. That it was no mere ornament is evident from the fact that while the house faces the east, the window is at an angle that enables it to catch the sunshine from the south, and to direct its rays upon the pot containing the mid-day meal. Candles, of course, were too expensive to be used on every occasion, and the housewife doubtless welcomed this novel arrangement, seeing that it enabled her to superintend her culinary operations with comfort and economy.<sup>1</sup> In one of the principal apartments a

<sup>1</sup> Duty on the manufacture of candles was imposed by an Act passed in the reign of Queen Anne. With the view of eluding the tax private individuals, it seems, were in the habit of making homely substitutes of their own. The legality

quaint oak - panelled oratory, almost intact, with hinges resembling those to be found in George



ORATORY.

Heriot's Hospital, encloses one half of a corner double window.

of this proceeding was in 1727 made the subject of a test case. The defenders denied that they manufactured candles, but admitted that "they had made of old linnen and such like rags, a kind of lights which they rubbed between their hands with greeze and other kitchen stuff; and sometimes there was mixed with the same greeze or other stuff the tallow of sheep dying of diseases in the fields, but that the rags were never dipp'd as candles are, but rubb'd between their hands, or upon a board, or wrought with their hands round a rag, but that the greeze so compounded was never refin'd, and these rags so greezed were made use of by them and their servants for lights in going out and in to the stables, byres, and other outhouses, for feeding and bedding their horses, nolt, and cows, and other necessary uses without house, and sometimes had been put above the kitchen chimneys for light to the servants in making their own meat, and in making mashes for supping their cattle." The decision in this case was in favour of the Excise.—*Edinburgh Courant*, 1727.

Upon examining Gordon of Rothiemay's map of Edinburgh, one is struck by the clustering of houses on the sloping ground north and south of the High Street. These houses appear so closely built together that where they do not actually join they are



CLOSE NEIGHBOURS.

separated only by a few feet. An illustration of this outrageous custom may be seen from the back windows of this old mansion, which almost touches a neighbouring tenement. Whether the builders were actuated by personal malice, or by a desire to economise space, must remain a matter of conjecture; but it is probable that private squabbles were too frequently the originating cause.

While it is said that the Scottish girls of the

eighteenth century could run up and down the steep closes of Edinburgh with the greatest confidence,<sup>1</sup> history is silent as to how their parents clambered to the High Street, or as to whether constant practice enabled them to grapple with difficulties that modern citizens shrink from facing. Their feelings, however, may be guessed from their readiness to alter the level of these alleys at every opportunity. An amusing document presented to the Town Council in 1714 by the heritors of Burnet's Close, besides giving an instance of this kind, affords a curious glimpse of old-world times. The petitioners have a most grievous complaint to make. They say that, having improved the close from being "the worst and steepest" to "the best and straightest" in Edinburgh, it had come to be "frequented by the nobility, gentry, magistrates, and inhabitants of the neighbourhood." They complain, however, that of late it has become "masterfully and cruelly opprest not only by the pudding-wives, nausious servants carrying of beast's blood, their graith, tripes, and other nastiness," etc., but also by "the fleshers, their rustick servants, and mastive dogs, driving up the said Wind their great fedd cattle, Highland coves, sheep and lambs." These, they say, frequently go into the houses, and the "students and scholars are so much in hazard that they can neither winn up or doun the closs, and are nonplust whether to go backward or forward to save themselves." The drivers

<sup>1</sup> Topham's *Letters*.



CATTLE SCENE IN BURNET'S CLOSE.



are so rude that "no intreaty can prevail with them to moderat their fury—beating with their clubs and staves upon the doors and walls, but upon the contrair a modest intreaty does inflame their fury."<sup>1</sup> Drovers from the south had evidently taken this short cut to the slaughter-houses, then situated near the south-eastern margin of the Nor' Loch, or to the High Street itself, which, judging from Acts of Town Council and even of Parliament, too often resembled a country fair.

The men of letters connected with Burnet's Close included several members of the select society of Edinburgh. Such, for instance, was the accomplished Dr. Hugh Blair<sup>2</sup> (before he went to Argyle Square), author of the well-known lectures on Rhetoric and Belles-Lettres. The Town Council Commission, appointing him to be professor of Rhetoric in the University of Edinburgh, speaks of the "accuracy and elegance of his pulpit compositions, and his ingenious, learned, and instructive lectures on the nature of language and style, the different kinds of public speaking, and the principles of the chief species of literary composition both in prose and verse, which lectures he publicly delivered last winter, and were highly approved by many gentlemen of most distinguished taste and knowledge in this city."<sup>3</sup> Dr. Blair's next-door neighbour was

<sup>1</sup> Town Council Muniments.

<sup>2</sup> Burgh Stent Roll in City Chambers.

<sup>3</sup> Town Council Muniments.

Dr. Stevenson,<sup>1</sup> who held the chair of logic and mathematics from 1730 till 1774, and whose "merits and memory were long a tradition in the University." Stevenson was the first who questioned the utility of scholastic logic as a study for youths in our Scottish universities, and in lieu thereof introduced miscellaneous lectures. Then there was Lord Auchinleck,<sup>2</sup> father of James Boswell, author of the famous *Life of Johnson*. Boswell, indeed, was probably born in this close. Another distinguished literateur was Sir James Dalrymple,<sup>3</sup> son of the Earl of Stair, and grandfather of Sir John Dalrymple of Cranston. The second Earl of Aberdeen seems also to have lived here.<sup>4</sup> Among the musicians was "Malcolm M'Pherson, pandararium, lie violer," who appears to have combined fiddling with pawnbroking at the beginning of last century. William Gow,<sup>5</sup> another musician, was better known. He was the eldest son of the celebrated Niel Gow, and besides leading the Assembly orchestra in 1784-85, composed several good reels and strathspeys. Here also lived in 1782 Robert M'Intosh,<sup>6</sup> or "Red Rob," whose numerous compositions, according to Mr. Glen, stamp him as a Scottish musician of the first order. He named three of his thirteen children "Robert," two of them being alive at the same time.<sup>7</sup> In Burnet's

<sup>1</sup> Title-deeds in City Archives.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Stent Roll.

<sup>5</sup> Williamson's *Directory*.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> We have found parallel cases in the Burgh Register of Sasines.

Close, it may be mentioned, the famous St. Fillan's crosier was shown prior to being handed over to the Antiquarian Museum. It was advertised as follows: "To antiquaries and the curious in general—To be seen first entry below Covenant Close, High Street, on Monday the 11th January 1808, and for a few days afterwards, a most curious relic of Scottish antiquity, which has been in the family of the present proprietor since and before the time of King Robert Bruce, and was confirmed to them by a grant from King James IV. (a copy of which will be shown), being a relic of the famous St. Fillan, under which the Scottish army vowed either to conquer or die, previous to the memorable battle of Bannockburn. Admittance 2s. from ten to four o'clock."<sup>1</sup> The crosier was subsequently carried to America, and after many vicissitudes was in 1876 purchased by the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.

Near the top of Burnet's Close, Robert Trotter,<sup>2</sup> ancestor of the Trotters of Mortonhall, dwelt in what was called a "Croce-house." This expression has long been a puzzle to antiquarians, doubts having arisen as to whether it refers to a house where a crucifix used for ceremonial occasions was kept, to a house where taxes exigible at the cross were paid, or simply to a house built cross-wise. The term is not peculiar to Edinburgh, but is common to all parts of

<sup>1</sup> *Edinburgh Courant*.

<sup>2</sup> *Burgh Register*, June 1742, where he is referred to as the late Robert Trotter.

Scotland, and appears in title-deeds both before and after the Reformation. There is no direct proof that the Cross-house was connected with Roman Catholic observances, nor with the payment of taxes; but, on the other hand, we have found evidence to support the view that the houses so described earned their designation through being built cross-wise. "The land called croce-house" "in the end of Barclay's Close" is the way in which the transference of property on the north side of the High Street is registered in the Burgh Books of 1596. Still more precise is the statement made in 1600 with reference to Mr. John Nicolson's house. Not content with giving the Latin *transversa illa domo*, the notary parenthetically adds "Cors-hous." That the word "croce" was used in this sense appears from other documents, notably those referring to houses on the south side of the Nor' Loch. The narrow lane that ran between the houses and the Loch is described as "the croce-gait (road) leading from east to west." Besides, when the ecclesiastical meaning is required *cruz* is invariably used.<sup>1</sup> In addition to these convincing proofs it may be recalled that a queer old

<sup>1</sup> It has been sometimes pointed out that distinguished ecclesiastical dignatories have lived near these cross-houses, as, for example, in Trunk's Close, where there was a cross-house, and in the close with which we are dealing. But, on the other hand, the houses themselves were almost invariably occupied by laymen. The cross-house in the end of Barclay's Close was tenanted by a Magistrate—Bailie Alexander Hunter, who resigned it in favour of Hugh Brown, younger, merchant, in 1597.—Burgh Register of Sasines. See also No. 2162 of the Laing Charters.

village in the neighbourhood of Elphinstone, having buildings set down in delightful confusion, was known last century by the name of Crosshouses.

To the working-classes, and to tradesmen generally, Burnet's Close may be said to have a special interest, seeing that around a baker's shop at the top of the steep alley half a century ago there was fought a battle which terminated in the abolition of the tyrannical privileges exercised by Trade Incorporations.<sup>1</sup> Chiefly through the instrumentality of

<sup>1</sup> Instances of the extraordinary extent and scope of these privileges cannot be obtained from the records of the Incorporation of Baxters, because unfortunately only a few of these have escaped destruction, most of them having been used as wrappers for merchandise; but Mr. A. Bryson, solicitor, has shown us several papers belonging to the Edinburgh Hammermen's Incorporation, which admirably illustrate the point. For example, William Dempster, cutler, Kinross (1723), "in consideration of kindness shown by the Incorporation in restoring back to him a parcel of knives and forks seized by them from him, and whereby he encroached upon their privileges," binds himself, servants and others in his house, for all time coming never again to encroach upon their privileges in this way under a £60 penalty for each time, to be paid to the Boxmaster of the Incorporation for the use of the poor. Another illustration, still more absurd and tyrannical, as it shows the extent of their inquisitorial powers, will be found in the deposition of Christian Davidson, relict of Dr. William Ogilvie, of the Grammar School, Dundee, taken in 1735, before Bailie Jobson. Davidson admits having twelve years previously sold to Alexander Waddell, pewterer, Edinburgh, "an old brass lantern, about 5 lbs. weight, with an iron wedge fastening the ring on the inside, with small holes in the top, a false bottom, and two floors, three turned brass feet, and one or two iron ribs within." A third document, of date 1685, says: "Be it kend—William Wightman, skinner

George Gulland, whose son at present wears "the chains," an end was made to the flagrant abuse of power; and as that great achievement forms a connecting link between the past and the present, an account of it is worth giving. Gulland in 1822 commenced business as a baker in New Street—still at that time a fashionable neighbourhood, with stately mansions and beautiful gardens. Of the Bailie himself it is told that at his house delightful evenings were spent by many who afterwards became distinguished citizens of Edinburgh, among them being the late Sir George Harrison, who always gratefully remembered meeting a number of notables there when as a young man he had newly come to the city from Kirriemuir. In the capacity of a Canongate Magistrate, Gulland had the good fortune almost to save the reputation of Edinburgh, for when, through some mistake, Sir James Forrest and his colleagues in the Town Council failed to welcome Queen Victoria and her royal consort upon their arrival at Granton on a visit to the Scottish metropolis, Gulland and a few of his colleagues drove in their robes to the boundaries of the ancient burgh

burgh, Edinburgh, has received from the Incorporation of Hammermen a great number of buff belts that were taken from him and been in their possession four or five years, upon his payment of a certain sum of money for the use of the poor, and granting an obligation to the effect that he shall not during all the days of his lifetime make or sell shambo belts under penalty of £100, and that he shall sell the buff belts restored to a free-man beltmaker in Edinburgh."

and saluted Her Majesty. Of this the Canongotians long boasted, and by way of acknowledgment the civic rulers of the ancient burgh presented him with a copy of Sir Thomas Dick Lauder's *Memorial of the Royal Progress in Scotland*. Although of a social disposition, the Canongate baker could also hold



ABOLITION OF TRADE INCORPORATION PRIVILEGES—GULLAND  
PRESENTATION CUP.

his own with the world, and so he did not see the necessity or justice of requiring to join the Edinburgh as well as the Canongate Incorporation of Bakers before he could be allowed to sell Canongate-baked bread in his shop at 158 High Street. Declination to accede to this trade regulation was followed by litigation, ending in a com-

promise. Thereupon Gulland set on foot a movement to abolish corporation privileges, a work in which he was greatly assisted by Mr. Kerr, tailor, Register Street, Secretary of the Non-Freemen's Association, formed with that object specially in view. Traveling throughout Scotland, these two stirred up all the larger cities, and created such excitement that Macaulay, then member for Edinburgh, afterwards aided by Lord Advocate Rutherford, took the matter in hand, and succeeded in passing a bill through Parliament abolishing all corporation privileges. From that day till now tradesmen have without restriction commenced business wherever they chose. To commemorate this happy occasion, Gulland was presented with a massive silver jug, which for workmanship and artistic design is seldom equalled in modern gifts.

It may be of interest to mention that Sir William Johnston of W. & A. K. Johnston (the present Bailie Gulland's uncle) had his first establishment also at the top of Burnet's Close. Through the influence of Learmonth of the Dean, Sir William was admitted to the Town Council, and in 1843 was elevated to the Magistracy, from which he advanced to the Provost's chair in 1848. During Johnston's civic reign Gulland became a Magistrate in the reformed Town Council of Edinburgh, and died while holding the office.



## BELL'S WYND

Oldest publication in Scotland—Johnson's *Musical Museum*—Burns's interest in the work—Marjoribanks of Ratho—Remnant of the old Tronemen—Archie Campbell, city officer—Bell, the brewer—The wig-makers—Jeffrey's grandfather—Shaving on the Sabbath day.

ASSOCIATED with Bell's Wynd are many interesting memories, of which we are continually reminded by its grisly weather-beaten walls. The Clam Shell Turnpike, the fashionable Assembly Rooms opened in 1758, the renowned Mary's Chapel, belonging to one of the oldest of the Incorporated Societies—these alone would have done more than invest the neighbourhood with a mere dreamy sentiment. Bell's Wynd, however, may claim to be an outstanding landmark on other grounds. Here in 1708 was printed the first newspaper authorised by the Government in this kingdom—*The Scots Postman, or the New Edinburgh Gazette*. This paper, we are told in the first number, "had been for a long time under discouragement," or it would have made its appearance much sooner. No expense was to be spared to "settle correspondence in all the needful parts of the

world for intelligence," and the news was to be "fetcht from its true original." The *Scots Postman* was in 1714 amalgamated with the *Gazette*, now the



BELL'S WYND—REDUCED FROM DRUMMOND'S ETCHING.

medium for official announcements by the Government, and the oldest publication in Scotland, having been founded in 1690. James Donaldson, the publisher, made a specialty of funeral cards with a border of "skeletons, mortcloths, and other emblems of mortality."

So far as Scotland is concerned, a much more interesting literary venture found its birthplace in Bell's Wynd—Johnson's *Scots Musical Museum*, in which Burns took the deepest interest, and which he made the medium of introducing to the world some of his heart-stirring songs. The book had the additional merit of preserving for posterity a number of beautiful melodies that would otherwise have been irretrievably lost. James Johnson was a well-known engraver, music-seller, and copper-plate printer, who had the credit of being "the first to strike music upon pewter, whereby a great saving was made in the charge of the article." In this department he seems to have been most indefatigable, for his name is attached to the title-page of by far the greater part of the music published between 1757 and 1792. Having taken the liberty of raising the pitch of two popular melodies, he was made the subject of a poetical squib—

The Johnsons and Jardins of auld  
Were said to be wonderfu' loons,  
But here is a Johnson sae bauld  
He has lifted a couple of toons.

During his visit to Edinburgh Burns might frequently have been observed sauntering down Bell's Wynd to Johnson's workshop, there to spend an hour with the "honest Scotch enthusiast," who was engaged in an undertaking exactly to the poet's taste. How much Johnson owed to this friendship no one can tell, but the *Musical Museum* took

such a hold of Burns that writing of it to a friend he said, "I have collected, begged, borrowed, and stolen all the songs I could meet with." To Johnson himself he wrote from Mauchline, November 15, 1788: "Perhaps you may not find your account lucratively in this business, but you are a patriot for the music of your country, and I am certain posterity will look on themselves as highly indebted to your public spirit. Be not in a hurry; let us go on correctly, and your name shall be immortal. I am preparing a flaming preface for your third volume. I see every day new musical publications advertised; but what are they? Gaudy, painted butterflies of a day, and then vanish for ever; but your work will outlive the momentary neglects of idle fashion, and defy the teeth of time. Have you never a fair goddess that leads you a wild-goose chase of amorous devotion? Let me know a few of her qualities, such as whether she be rather black or fair, plump or thin, short or tall, etc., and choose your air, and I shall task my muse to celebrate her." On the same day Burns wrote to Dr. Blacklock that he had done many little things for Johnson. Burns wrote prefaces for the last three volumes, and presented copies of the work to several of his friends, including Mrs. Rose, in recognition of his delightful visit to Kilravock. For his own use he procured an interleaved copy, upon which he made remarks on the songs and airs, and stated what he knew of their authors.

It is impossible to study Old Edinburgh history

without everywhere stumbling across men like Moubray of Barnbogle, the Hendersons of Fordell, the Primroses, and the Marjoribanks of Ratho—a Midlothian village that was in these days annexed to the barony and regality of Renfrew. Of the two first mentioned there is no occasion to speak at present. But the Marjoribanks, ancestors of Lord Tweedmouth, lived for many years in Bell's Wynd.<sup>1</sup> During that period, and down to a much more recent date, the family were closely connected with local history, two of the name having filled the Lord Provost's chair,<sup>2</sup> and others having been judges and members of the Scottish Estate. There were various branches of this family, and the name occurs very frequently in the Burgess Roll, particularly from the beginning of the seventeenth century. In 1535 Thomas Marjoribanks was appointed advocate for the poor jointly with Dr. Gladstones, who with his colleague's consent received the magnificent salary of £10 a year.<sup>3</sup> As one of four "honest men" selected by the Privy Council he had also in 1551 to inquire into the great dearth and exorbitant price of "all manner of stuff, alsweill horse meat as mannis meit."<sup>4</sup> Christian Marjoribanks, believed to be the grand-

<sup>1</sup> Title-deeds in City Archives.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Marjoribanks of Ratho in 1540, and Sir John Marjoribanks of Lees in 1814 and again in 1825. Sir John distinguished himself by carrying forward the improvements of the city, and was the chief promoter of the erection of the Calton Jail and the Regent Bridge.

<sup>3</sup> *Scottish Nation*.

<sup>4</sup> Privy Council Records.

daughter of the above, married George Heriot in 1586. At this period Thomas Marjoribanks of Ratho, presumably her father, was living in Bell's Wynd, so that there is reasonable ground for believing that Jinglin' Geordie celebrated his first marriage there.

The Muses appear last century to have found a very congenial atmosphere in Bell's Wynd, for the title-deeds show that, besides being the birthplace of newspapers and Scottish national song-books, it was the abode of musicians that made some little stir in their day. Among them was Alexander Napier,<sup>1</sup> who belonged to a family of talented musicians, one of whose descendants now successfully carries on business in that line in London. Another was Joseph Puppo,<sup>2</sup> who, as leader of the concerts held in St. Cecilia's Hall, was caricatured in a London periodical as "First Cat-gut Scraper." And then, too, there was a musical instrument maker, Christian Shean, "lately arrived from London," advertising in 1761<sup>3</sup> that she "made and sold all sorts of harpsicords and spinets, etc." By way of variety an eccentric apple-wife, residing in the same Wynd, announces the arrival of "a parcel of bitter and sweet oranges, to be had either at her house or at her stand above the Court of Guard," and adds, "She has the only sour oranges in town, whatever others may pretend to." The mention of the Court of Guard recalls a curious circumstance in connection with this Wynd.

<sup>1</sup> Title-deeds.

<sup>2</sup> Williamson's *Directory*.

<sup>3</sup> *Edinburgh Courant*.

When in 1785 the obnoxious military police and the humble tronemen, or city sweeps, were evicted from the Guard-House in High Street, they were housed in Bell's Wynd, but the residents made such an outcry that the City Guard had new quarters assigned



THE TRONEMEN'S HOME.

to them in the Old Tolbooth. No objection was raised against the douce tronemen, who quietly settled down in the Wynd, bequeathed their grimy business to their descendants, and are represented there till this day. One venerable sweep fondly recalls the time when he had the city's work, including the hundred odd chimneys of the Council Chambers. Now a martyr to cataract, he is employed by few, and spends most of his time in a little, dingy, sooty chamber, "waiting for something to turn up." Were

Old Edinburgh dwellers in the habit of making war against smoky chimneys the old troneman might readily have work enough. In almost every second stair there is at least one door open to make life possible ; and if the visitor lingers a moment, a woman, like a fish poking its nose through the surface of the lake for its intermittent supply of fresh air, may be seen gasping for breath outside the door, and then retreating to her abode of semi-darkness, rendered only more dismal by the feeble flicker of the fire.

Among others who lived in this Wynd was the Rev. Robert Bannerman,<sup>1</sup> son of Sir Alexander Bannerman of Elswick, Kincardineshire, whose ancestors were hereditary banner-bearers to the kings of Scotland. Sir Alexander had on his arms a demi-man in armour holding in his right hand a sword proper. This his Covenanter son, much to the disgust of students of heraldry, converted into a man in a priest's habit, emerging from a roof in praying posture. In the seventeenth century one comes across James Cathcart, of Carbiston,<sup>2</sup> a son of Lord Cathcart, ancestor of the Duke of Queensberry. Cathcart married a daughter of James Rothead, of Innerleith, and by charter, dated 1672, conveyed his lands to the Heriot governors, who are still the superiors. At this time, as may be learned from the recently published Lonsdale Manuscripts, chambers, fire, and bed for twenty-four hours cost in Bell's Wynd tenpence. Half a century afterwards, according

<sup>1</sup> Title-deeds in Council Chambers.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*



to a petition considered by the Town Council, the tavern in Cathcart's Land was "noted for the first and greatest resort of company."<sup>1</sup> Coming to later times, we find the name of Thomas Ruddiman, proprietor of the *Caledonian Mercury* and librarian to the Faculty of Advocates.<sup>2</sup> Whether the "James Naesmyth, Depute Clerk for the City of Edinburgh,"<sup>3</sup> was ancestor of the founder of the landscape school of painting in Scotland, and the inventor of the steam hammer, we have been unable to determine. There is, however, nothing outrageous in the supposition, as there was a clever lawyer of that name in the family known by the sobriquet of "Deil o' Dawick," and distinguished members of the family, as we shall show, passed many years of their life in an adjoining close. In Bell's Wynd lived the far-famed city officer, Archibald Campbell, whose house belonged to the family for nearly forty years.<sup>4</sup> Archie was a native of Rannoch, Perthshire, and gave himself out as a far-away cousin of the Duke of Argyle. In 1793 he came to Edinburgh, where he was a familiar personage for over half a century, being officer to the High Constables, Convention of Royal Burghs, Highland Club, and Dean of Guild Court, besides filling the offices of king's beadle at the meetings of the General Assembly, Justice of the Peace Constable, and "almost every office of a like manner in the city."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Town Council Muniments, 1750.

<sup>2</sup> Title-deeds in City Archives.    <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*    <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Campbell forms the last of the series of Kay's Portraits.

Only one other individual need be mentioned—John Bell, brewer, who had property at the foot of the Wynd,<sup>1</sup> and from whom, it is said, the Wynd took its name.<sup>2</sup> Bell's brewery, long famous for its ale—"Black Cork" it was called by connoisseurs<sup>3</sup>—is shown in Edgar's map of 1765. It was situated on the east side of Pleasance, at the foot of Drummond Street, and was nearly consumed by fire in 1794.

Wig-making, which was an important industry in Edinburgh, was briskly carried on in Bell's Wynd, especially after 1722, when the barbers were separated from the surgeons, and acquired premises in Bell's Wynd for a meeting-place.<sup>4</sup> It is recorded that one of these wig-makers was grandfather to Lord Jeffrey, who in his teens used to spend an occasional hour gossiping with the old shaver. One day, when fast becoming famous, the young advocate dragged Harry Cockburn very unwillingly down the steep Wynd, but his youthful colleague objected to the penetrating odour, and was glad of an excuse for escaping from the barbers' quarters.

In the middle of the eighteenth century there lived in a house at the back of the Clam Shell Turnpike a barber and wig-maker, named James Fairholm, who, tradition says, had something to do with framing a most extraordinary petition to the Town Council.

<sup>1</sup> Title-deeds in City Archives.

<sup>2</sup> A succession of Bells lived in this ancient Wynd.

<sup>3</sup> Evidence in the trial of Deacon Brodie.

<sup>4</sup> Title-deeds in City Archives.

This petition, dated 1765, contains a complaint on behalf of the peruke-makers, barbers, and hairdressers of Edinburgh and suburbs, that "on Sabbath Day we are under the necessity of practising publicly that part of our business which consists of shaving and dressing, whereby the means employed by our parents in our youth for our instruction in religion and virtue are wholly dissipated, and instead of being useful members of society, we have become odious to ourselves as well as to our fellow-tradesmen." The Council, the only body that can remedy this state of matters, are asked to "seriously consider our distressful situation. Debarred from hearing divine worship, no wonder we become dissolute, not to say worse."<sup>1</sup> The petition does not appear to have had the desired effect. In 1783 Sunday, says Arnot, was the busiest day in the week for hairdressers; their services too were so highly prized that a "professor" found it advantageous to establish an academy and lecture on the art, while perfumers kept live bears so that they might have one ready to kill whenever their supply of grease was exhausted.

<sup>1</sup> Town Council Muniments.

## THE CLAM SHELL TURNPIKE

Founded by George, Bishop of Dunkeld—Origin of the name—  
Visit of Queen Mary—Bishop Crichton's nephew—Bedesmen  
of the Hospital of St. Thomas—Their annual celebration—  
Clam Shell Turnpike passes into laymen's hands at the  
Reformation—Robert Crichton of Elliock—Remains of his  
house.

AT the head of Bell's Wynd stood the Clam Shell Turnpike, an episcopal residence built in the time of James V. for George Crichton, Bishop of Dunkeld. This stately mansion was for long the home of the Crichtons—first two high dignitaries of the Church, and next a representative of the Crown and his kinsman successively pursuing their diverse callings within its precincts. There is no ground whatever for suggesting that it might have been the local headquarters of the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem. Regarding its name a simple enough explanation is offered; it originated from the tower enclosing the turnpike stair having been embellished with a clam shell. The connection of a clam shell with architecture dates from the Middle Ages, when pilgrimages to the Church of St. James at Santiago de Compostella, who was the patron saint of Spain, were quite

a passion among all classes, and the local shrines were comparatively forsaken. In front of their hats the Compostella pilgrims wore escallop shells, which, says tradition, served often as cup and dish for them in Palestine. From that time escallop shells in a coat of arms have signified that some of the bearer's line have visited the shrine of St. James.<sup>1</sup> In Edinburgh the escallop shell was frequently used for decorating both the exterior and interior of houses. An example of the latter is to be seen in the clam shell cupboard in Covenant Close, to which we have referred. The Clam Shell Land in Carrubber's Close was a well-known object; and the Clam Shell Turnpike in the High Street will always be remembered for its connection with eminent characters, and with interesting eras in Scottish history. George Crichton, for whose accommodation the Clam Shell Turnpike was built, succeeded to the bishopric two years after the death of Gavin Douglas. He was Abbot of Holyrood House, and seems to have been a typical "jolly friar"—"a man nobly disposed, very hospitable, and a magnificent housekeeper, but in matters of religion not much skilled."<sup>2</sup> To this mansion—"the house of the old Bishop of Dunkeld"—Queen Mary retreated with Darnley on her return to Edinburgh in 1566, and found with her devoted and zealous adherent, Lord Home, that peace of mind which a visit to Holyrood Palace so soon after the

<sup>1</sup> Nisbet's *Heraldry*.

<sup>2</sup> Keith's *Historical Catalogue of the Scottish Bishops*.

assassination of Rizzio would have rendered utterly impossible.<sup>1</sup> Upon old age approaching, George generously retired in favour of his nephew. This pardonable stratagem, however, was frustrated by the Earl of Arran, Governor of the Kingdom, who appointed his own natural son to fill the office. Five more years passed before Robert Crichton was in 1550 promoted to the See, and by that time the old bishop, his uncle, had died. Being the last of the pre-Reformation Bishops of Dunkeld, Robert had many difficulties to encounter, but his courage never failed. He alone of all the Bishops was bold enough to receive the nuncio sent by Pius IV. to Mary, and only one other Church dignitary joined him in a reply to the Pontifical letters. The nuncio, whom John Knox characterised as "an emissary of the Devil sent by Baal and Beelzebub," met the Bishop "on an island somewhere (would it be Inchcolme?) with no other human habitation near." In the end Robert was ousted from his bishopric by the new reformers.<sup>2</sup>

The Clam Shell Turnpike at the Reformation fell into the hands of laymen, but it did not yet pass out of the Crichton family. Scarcely had the excitement incidental to the new-born Reformation abated before Robert Crichton of Elliock, father of the celebrated Admirable Crichton, received his appointment as

<sup>1</sup> The *Diurnal of Occurrents* says that the Queen's retinue of 2000 horsemen found accommodation in the burgh.

<sup>2</sup> Keith.

Queen's Advocate. Crichton occupied the third storey "with the back land and pendicles thereof built over Bell's Wynd,"<sup>1</sup> and here he seems to have been passing a somewhat uneventful life while his son, the Matchless, was astonishing the scholars of the old world with startling proofs of universal knowledge and accomplishments. In the tenement lying immediately within the entrance to Bell's Wynd numerous sixteenth-century touches may still be observed. So far as concerns the archway supporting the "pendicles" over the Wynd, there is nothing inconsistent with the supposition that it is of pre-Reformation origin. Supported by the archway is an apartment containing an immense recessed window that commands a good view of the Wynd. This recess must have proved very useful, not only when there were gay and festive scenes below, but in times of great danger, when angry clansmen impetuously rushed up the narrow defile on their way to a High Street tuilzie. Ascending to the attics by a staircase having a singularly elegant balustrade, one reaches a delightfully cosy room, over which artists in search of interiors for illustrating Sir Walter Scott's works might well be excused for becoming crazy. The panelling covers even the coom of the ceiling, and has about it a touch of the Renaissance, clearly showing that it dates from the period when the departure from the Gothic outline of sections and mouldings had commenced.

<sup>1</sup> Title-deeds in City Archives.

A circumstance overlooked in connection with the Clam Shell Turnpike is that "the middle tenement of land, called the middle lodging of the tenement," "formerly belonged to the bedesmen of the hospital near the Abbey of Holyrood-house."<sup>1</sup> The "middle lodging," doubtless, was the Maison Dieu, with which the name of this mansion is associated.

Bedesmen, were an ancient fraternity attached to royal foundations, and their function was to pray for the souls of the king's ancestors and successors. Each royal birthday their number was increased by one, and their pension by a penny. The royal bounty consisted of a roll of bread, a tankard of ale, and a web of blue cloth to be made into a gown; along with a peculiarly constructed purse, which only the initiated could open, containing as many pence as the years of the king's age. Their blue gowns were adorned with a pewter badge, which allowed

<sup>1</sup> Title-deeds in City Archives. The Burgh Register of Sasines records that in 1582 Robert Chalmers, fifth son of Alexander Chalmers, acquired "the mid lodging of Mr. Alexander Chalmers, Vicar of the Parish Church of Liberton, within the tenement belonging to the Hospital of St. Thomas at the head of Bell's Wynd." In that year also David Crichton, Vicar of Ouchtermill, came into possession of "the two upper chambers, front and back," which had been "doted by George Bishop of Dunkeld to the Hospital of St. Thomas." By charter, dated 5th September 1594, he granted these to James Donaldson, advocate. For witnesses to the charter there are Walter Henrieson, writer; David Boys, and Alexander Pyet, servitor to Walter; Pat. Donaldson, James Copland, and others. The giving of the sasine is witnessed by James Keith, brother of Lord Ruthvens Craig, and others.



them to "pass and repass" when they went a-begging.

The religious house specially referred to as being near Holyrood House was the Hospital of St. Thomas, founded in 1541 by Bishop Crichton (then Abbot of Holyrood-house), and "dedicated to God, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and all the saints." By way of celebrating the death of the founder the Blue Gowns had annually to sing "the Placebo and Dirige" in the choir of Holyrood. The distribution of the royal bounty was continued till the present century. St. Giles' bedesmen used to receive theirs in front of the Tolbooth, at a place known as "The Poor Man's Purses." The bedesmen of St. Thomas's Hospital seem latterly to have had theirs distributed in front of the Canongate Church. "It used to be a very interesting sight on a fine summer morning," says Sir Daniel Wilson, "to see the strange groups of Blue Gowns of all ages, from forty-five to ninety and upwards. Venerable-looking men, bent with the weight of years; some lame, others blind, led by a boy or wife, whose tartan or hodden-gray told of the remote districts from whence they had come, or, perhaps, by a rough Highland dog, looking equally strange on the streets of the ancient burgh; while all the old bedesmen were clad in their monastic-looking habits, and with large badges on their breasts." The Hospital of St. Thomas was purchased by the Magistrates of Canongate in 1617.

## MARY'S CHAPEL AND THE NEW ASSEMBLY ROOM

History of the Incorporation—Ancient lodge of Freemasons—Deacon Brodie—His new “drop” first tried on himself—Weavers’ Land—Introduction and growth of weaving—Public linen factories of the eighteenth century—Edinburgh shawls—The new Assembly Room—King’s Arms Tavern—Lord High Commissioner’s levees—A state dinner in 1802.

IF one may trust Hollar’s map in the British Museum, which is doubtful, Mary’s Chapel in Bell’s Wynd was set down beside a clump of trees near the Bishop of Dunkeld’s ancient mansion. From 1618 till 1787 the Incorporation of Wrights and Masons had occupied a much more famous edifice, on the east side of Niddry’s Wynd, which had been built, endowed, and dedicated to the Virgin Mary by Elizabeth, Countess of Ross. In its day that building was the leading public hall in Edinburgh, and, among other important events, it witnessed in 1736 the inauguration of the Grand Lodge of Scotland. After a most interesting history, which is well told by Mr. Murray Lyon, the ancient and illustrious Lodge of

Edinburgh (Mary's Chapel), No. 1, held its closing meeting there on 8th May 1786. On that occasion Thomas Sommers, burgess and freeman, glazier, gave a lecture on Masonry. The lodge was then closed with great solemnity, and the brethren were dismissed in due form, never again to meet in Mary's Chapel. Sommers, it may be recalled, was the friend and biographer of the poet Ferguson, who one day in passing left on his counter the following:—

Thom Sommers is a gloomy man ;  
 His mind is dark within.  
 O ! holy —— ! glaze his soul,  
 That light may enter in.

From 1795 till 1807 the lodge met in Bell's Wynd, and paid rent to the Incorporation of Wrights and Masons. Their last visit to the building was on Sunday, 17th January 1892, when they heard a sermon from the Rev. A. D. Robertson, pastor of the Congregational Church which for many years has worshipped there.

Mary's Chapel till May last belonged to the Incorporation of Wrights and Masons—a fraternity consisting of only fifteen members, but having fifteen widows on the pension list, and possessing funds to the amount of upwards of £18,000. The Incorporation of Wrights and Masons obtained some undesirable notoriety through the extraordinary criminality of William Brodie, their Deacon. Brodie was a man of wealth, and stood in high repute, having, like his father, served for a time in the Town Council. An enthusiast

at cock-fighting, he finally graduated as a gambler, and spent his nights at a club in Fishmarket Close managed by a tavern-keeper named Clark. There he fell in with three miscreants, and unaccountably became their leader in a series of mysterious and daring house-breakings that almost paralysed the citizens during the winter of 1786. Indeed the crimes are said to have been unsurpassed in the annals of cunning and audacity. Brodie went very coolly about the work. His practice was to carry a piece of putty in the palm of his hand ready to take the impression of house and shop keys which, with guileless simplicity, the people of an afternoon sometimes hung outside their doors. But his culminating crime was the robbery of the Excise Office in Chessel's Court, Canongate.

Brodie absconded after this affair, but chiefly through his correspondence with friends at home, including his mistress and her three children, he was apprehended at Amsterdam, just on the eve of departure for America. Meanwhile complete evidence of his remarkable dual existence had been collected—even his housebreaking tools being unearthed at the foot of Warriston Close, and his skeleton keys discovered near Salisbury Crags. Brodie appeared at the bar along with George Smith, one of his low associates, and after an exciting all-night trial, sentence of death was pronounced.

Late in the evening before his execution, Brodie was suddenly agitated by hearing a peculiar sound.

Turning to Smith he said, "Do you know what noise that is?" "No," said Smith. "Then I'll tell you," was the reply. "It is the drawing out of the fatal beam on which you and I must suffer to-morrow." Executions took place at the west end of the Tolbooth on the top of a one storey building, the noose being attached to a beam pushed through an aperture in the gable. Tradition says that amid the excitement of an execution, the city arabs occasionally managed to slip into the Tolbooth and strideleg this beam, either in bravado, or to enjoy the swaying motion imparted to it when the last penalty of the law was put into operation. Brodie knew the harsh grating sound of the beam, because he had been employed to make improvements on the gibbet—to adapt the grim apparatus for a "drop" in place of the ancient mode of working known as "the double ladder." And like the inventor of the Maiden, he himself was the first victim of his own ingenuity.

The execution was badly managed, Brodie having twice to descend from the platform, the second time with the quiet remark that the hangman was "a bungling fellow, and ought to be punished for his stupidity." When cut down, the body was instantly given to some of the deceased's workmen, who placed it on a cart and drove furiously away, with the idea that the rough jolting might produce resuscitation. A French quack then tried his skill, but life was extinct, Brodie through his own invention having been

put beyond human aid. We learn from Bailie Dunlop that specimens of Brodie's beautiful workmanship, recognisable by the trade, are still to be found in mansions throughout the city.

The convening-room belonging to the weavers of the eighteenth century was situated at the foot of Bell's Wynd in a tenement known as the Weavers' Land. In the manufacture of linen the Scottish metropolis once took a very high place, being as famous for its damask as for its wool markets, which were the greatest in Britain. Honest cloth, not shoddy and sham, was aimed at. No weaver was permitted to set up for himself until he had "served four years at the weaving of linnen and two years at the weaving of hemp." Even then he had to undergo a severe examination. In the middle of last century one merchant alone—Bailie M'Dougall—employed a hundred hands to make superfine broadcloth. Blankets and carpets were also manufactured. The public linen factories at that time employed from 800 to 1500 looms, of which about 90 were set apart for making flowered and plain silk gauze. Of these factories one memento alone remains—a door lintel with the motto, "My life is as a Weaver's Shuttle." It has very appropriately been built into a modern tenement near the site of the West Port factory.

Edinburgh was famous for its shawls, which were woven by Quakers in a row of cottages at Sciennes. The lower flats of the houses were used as work-

shops, and the weavers lived above. Many still living remember as boys having watched the weavers at work, either at the Sciennes or at the North Bridge shops, which had big windows in front and in rear. At that time one could scarcely walk the streets without meeting a Quaker. But Edinburgh shawls went out of fashion between the forties and fifties, and now Paisley has the trade.

A clever trick is said to have been played upon the weavers at Picardy Place by a native of Dunfermline. Jealous of their trade secrets, the weavers rigorously excluded strangers from their workshops. This fellow, however, completely allayed their suspicions by representing himself as silly. Allowed at length to enter the establishment and wander about unheeded, the "daft laddie" utilised the occasion so well that he picked up the art of weaving and took an accurate plan of a loom. This, says the story, was the origin of Dunfermline's great linen industry.

A pretty little tradition is associated with the name of an ancestor of a Haddingtonshire family—Broun of Coalstoun—who lived in a "great mansion" on the east side of Bell's Wynd.<sup>1</sup> This mansion stood near the site of what was recently known as the Trades Hall, and headed a close, called Snaddoun's, leading to the Cowgate. Towards the end of the fifteenth century the first of the Brouns married a daughter of Lord Yester, an ancestor of the Marquis

<sup>1</sup> Title-deeds in City Archives.

of Tweeddale, whose mansion at Tweeddale Court is now occupied by Messrs. Oliver and Boyd. In the Yester family was a pear, said to have the virtue of securing unfailing prosperity for the possessor's family. Originally it belonged to a remote ancestor, Hugo de Gifford, of Yester, the famous necromancer described in *Marmion*. The bride of the second baronet dreamt on the night following her marriage that she had eaten the famed "Coalstoun pear." Regarding this as a bad omen, her brother-in-law expressed a fear that she would be the means of destroying the house of Coalstoun. According to Debrett, the estates were sold, and the family were drowned in the Tyne. Another account states that the newly-married lady of Coalstoun felt a longing for the forbidden fruit, and took a bite of it; while a third version makes out that the culprit was an inquisitive maiden lady of the family. Soon afterwards two farms on the estate were lost in litigation. The six-hundred-year-old pear is now stone hard, but the teeth-marks upon it are, of course, incontrovertible proof of its marvellous virtues.

The great mansion at the top of Snaddoun's Close appears in 1580 to have been the residence of John Murray of Blackbarony, father of the first Lord Elibank.<sup>1</sup> The house itself belonged to the heirs of the Bishop of Dunkeld, on whose behalf Robert, Comendator of Dunfermline, and his spouse Lady Rosyth,

<sup>1</sup> Burgh Register. The close at this period bore Murray's name.



drew an annual rent of 100 marks.<sup>1</sup> It is curious to note that after the Reformation the old abbacies and priories were perpetuated in so-called commendatorships distributed among the new Protestant nobles or Protestant lairds. With the exception of managing the old ecclesiastical properties and drawing the revenues these commendators had no function whatever, and so little is known of them that a complete list of the holders of the office has not yet been compiled. In Snaddoun's Close lived also two of the famous Nasmyth family,—Sir Michael, chamberlain of the Archbishop of St. Andrews, and his son John. At the beginning of the seventeenth century John was "surgeon to his most serene Majesty and to the King of France's troop of guards from Scotland." He died in London in 1613, "to the grief of both nations," as the inscription on his tombstone in Greyfriars' churchyard testifies, his body having been sent to Edinburgh by royal command.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Burgh Register, 1580. Lady Rosyth belonged to the Murray family. A sasine dated 1597 states that William Turnbull, merchant, "drew an annual rent of 420 merks out of the two tenements sometime of the late John Murray of Blackbarony and Leonard Stevenson."

<sup>2</sup> The sasine relating to John Nasmyth's house ought to possess some interest on account of the information it contains regarding various well-known families. It is dated 1582, and states that Bailie Todrick passed to Nasmyth certain property "sometime belonging to the late Robert Mowbray, indweller in the town of Leith, afterwards to the late Alexander Uddart, merchant (Dean of Guild), and now belonging to John Uddart,

The "improved Assembly Room" formed part of what was recently known as the Trades Hall, a building that has had a somewhat chequered history. For over twenty years the quadrangle which forms its approach, and imparts to it an air of gentility still, was almost nightly illuminated by the sedan-chair bearers' torches, the smoke from which nearly filled the crowded ball-room before half the entertainment was over. To increase the accommodation a covered passage was thrown across Bell's Wynd, and a building there was used as a tea-room. This makeshift, however, did not serve long, and in 1784 the directors of fashion wisely discarded the old town for the new. The Assembly Buildings were next converted into a tavern—the King's Arms—which in the first decade of this century became the centre of scenes, if not as gay, at least more brilliant,

his brother, lying in the said burgh in the Cowgate, north side thereof, between the lands formerly of (Sir) John Francis of Busso; the lands sometime of the deceased John Newlands, now pertaining to John Naismyth, chirurgeon; the yard of the late Walter Scott called Bank House Yard, and the yard of the deceased Walter Chapman, now belonging to the heirs of the late Hugh Tod, on the west; the waste-land and yard of the deceased James Henrysoun, and the yard of the heirs of the late David Tod, now pertaining to Mr. John Laing, on the east; the lands of the heirs of the deceased Robert Fleming, James Bassindean, George Kincaid, and George Purves respectively on the north, and the Cowgate on the south." In Snaddoun's Close also about this period (Burgh Register, 1582 and 1593) there was "a large edifice called Thorter Houss," belonging to a wealthy merchant burghess named James Barron, and afterwards to his son, George Barron of Kynaird.

than ever Bell's Wynd had witnessed. In this commodious tavern<sup>1</sup> upon several occasions the Lord High Commissioner of the General Assembly held his levees; and one of the sights of the time, excelled perhaps only by the opening of the Scottish Parliament, was the annual procession from thence to the High Kirk. The Lord High Commissioner was Francis, Lord Napier, a nobleman of great kindness of disposition, who held the office for nearly twenty years. The procession was much more simple than now, for no carriages were used, but it had a quaintness of its own, as His Grace, equipped in Court dress, was preceded by the trumpeters, and accompanied by many of the nobility and gentry, and was received by the magistrates of the city in their official robes. Picturesqueness was imparted to the scene by the presence of the Lochaber Fencibles and the City Guard, who lined the streets. "On the day of the meeting of the Assembly" (1802), says a newspaper of the day, "between seventy and eighty noblemen and gentlemen of the first rank dined with His Grace the Commissioner at the King's Arms Tavern. There were green peas and French beans in great perfection and abundance, being a present from Thomas Ogilvy, Esq., of Chesters. There was also a dish of strawberries from the garden of Mr. Dalgleish, at Newbattle. The decorations of the table and the dessert were fanciful and elegant."

<sup>1</sup> A ground floor, two flats above, and the room used as the Assembly Hall.—Title-deeds.

## MARY'S CHAPEL AND NEW ASSEMBLY ROOM 187

In 1807 the King's Arms Tavern was acquired by the Highland Society of Scotland, and remained in their possession until 1813. From 1814 to 1847 it was occupied by the Commercial Bank, after which the Free Tron Church had the use of it. It was then converted into Good Templar Buildings, next it became a Trades Hall, and now it is the Children's Shelter.

## STEVENLAW'S CLOSE AND THE BLACK TURNPIKE

Rebel citizens—Shipmasters and Leith Harbour—Early days in Stevenlaw's Close—St. Catharine's altar—Black Turnpike—Its distinguished occupants—The Abercrombies and Crichtons—Interesting bit near the Tron Church.

A WRITER about modern Edinburgh may advantageously consult the ready-made directories of a century, but one in search of something new concerning Old Edinburgh must laboriously construct from the Burgh Register a directory of his own. When a lengthened period is brought under review this work is somewhat fertile. New facts are plentifully revealed, doubtful statements are tested, and conjectures, it must be confessed, are sometimes found to be ludicrously misleading.

Upon glancing at the Privy Council Records, which supply the missing links of the Burgh Register, one is struck by the large number of prominent Edinburgh citizens who earned the distinction of rebels. But this outlawry involved no great social degradation. Even the highest nobles in the land thought lightly of an action for debt, and the familiar three blasts of

the horn at the Market Cross or at Leith Pier, which invariably preceded the denouncing of rebels, was for many years an everyday occurrence. Payment of fine and costs, however, restored the status of a citizen; and it was only persistent refusal to yield that raised him to the much more serious position of a king's rebel.<sup>1</sup>

Stevenlaw's Close in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, being occupied chiefly by merchant princes, contributed a fair amount of these minor rebels, the exigencies of their profession frequently bringing them in contact with the law. Most of the traders—some of them sons of the nobility—had a direct interest in the few ships that sailed between Leith and foreign parts. The risk of transit by sea was considerable; not only had the ships to run the gauntlet of hostile privateers, but they also had pirates to fear. From time to time pitiful stories about Scotsmen languishing in foreign prisons enlisted at home the sympathies of their fellow-countrymen, who raised ransom money by church-door collections. Sometimes the arrival of a trading vessel from a plague-stricken quarter frightened the Edinburgh folk out of their wits. Upon one occasion a vessel that had lost some of her crew on the voyage was quarantined at Inchcolme for such a lengthened period that she was deserted by the home-sick seamen, and nothing short of a threat to empty the cargo on the shore could induce the panic-stricken

<sup>1</sup> *The Scotsman* of 31st October 1894 announced the abolition of the Horning Office.

owners to take delivery. Besides these risks the merchants had to take the chance of their vessel safely entering the Port of Leith. So recently as 1747 the shipmasters petitioned Edinburgh Town Council with reference to the dangers of that ancient harbour, "one ship having sprung a leak through resting on a large stone whereby she would be filled full of water." Similar accidents, they added, were of frequent occurrence. Slow to move in the matter, the authorities were next year reminded that there were "large stones concealed in the mud." A vessel loaded with linseed had "put into a berth opposite Wullie Water's Close, sat down upon a large stone, and had a cargo almost entirely damnified," while "one of the Edinburgh Company's ships (the *Britannia*, Duncan Pollock, master), from London with a very valuable cargo for Edinburgh merchants, received considerable damage both in ship and cargo."<sup>1</sup>

Stevenlaw's Close may be traced for three or four centuries. In the earlier references it bore the name of Telfer (Taillziefer), but Lawrence Telfer<sup>2</sup> removed to the north side of the High Street at the close of the sixteenth century, and then Stewin Lawe, the wealthy flesher burgess that had sided with Queen Mary, was immortalised.

Three blocks of once aristocratic tenements were removed from the west side of the close about ten

<sup>1</sup> Town Council Muniments.

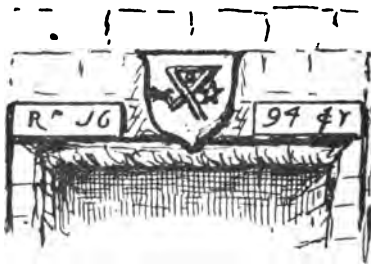
<sup>2</sup> Lawrence Telfer married a sister of John Carkettill, cousin to Mr. Andrew Haliburton, Conservator of the Scots at Middlebro'.—"Ledger of Haliburton, 1492-1503."

or twelve years ago. These had been occupied by Mrs. Moray Bruce (of the Kennet family), Nisbet of Carphin, Little of Gilmerton, one of a race of eminent merchants in Edinburgh; and Lockhart of Carnwath,<sup>1</sup> who would probably hold social gatherings here only one degree less brilliant than those he subsequently inaugurated at Ross House. Turning to more homely personages, we find that in this quarter also lived Daft Jamie, one of the victims of Burke and Hare. He was a frequent visitor at the tronemen's house in Bell's Wynd, where he warmed his feet by the ingle, produced his favourite brass spoon, and invited the sweeps to "tak' a snuff." Until some years ago a tenement at the foot of the close had over the doorway the motto, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. J. H." The initials were probably those of one of the Hendersons of Fordell that lived in the close in the sixteenth century. Religious mottoes in connection with domestic architecture were not of Protestant but of Roman Catholic origin, and seemed to indicate that the people were deeply impressed with the value of belief in their peculiar tenets. But while in early times scriptural quotations on domestic architecture may have tended to purify the moral atmosphere, their absence now must not be too seriously regarded as an indication of backsliding. It would really be too absurd to utilise shoddy modern houses for the purpose of teaching a lesson in morality.

<sup>1</sup> Title-deeds.



Some of the ancient property in Stevenlaw's Close was associated with the worship of patron saints. One of these ecclesiastical buildings was at the Cowgate end of the close, and contained an altar dedicated to St. Catharine.<sup>1</sup> This saint, however, was not Catharine of Siena, in whose memory Sciennes convent was founded, but a virgin of royal



DOORWAY IN STEVENLAW'S CLOSE.

descent in Alexandria, who, for confessing the Gospel at a sacrificial feast in 307 A.D., was tortured on a wheel and put to death by the Emperor Maximinius. In 1483 an annual rent of 26s. 8d. Scots over a High Street tenement was bequeathed through the Black Friars to this altar by Alexander Inglis, "chief arch-deacon of the Cathedral Church of St. Andrews and Dean of Dunkeld and elect of the same," for the souls of his father and mother and his wife Margaret.<sup>2</sup> One would think that Inglis wanted full value for his money. The condition attached to the gift was

<sup>1</sup> Title-deeds in City Archives.

<sup>2</sup> Laing Charters.

that, on the anniversary of his death the Friars should sing a requiem mass, and with hand-bells ringing through the town, exhort the people to pray for his soul, and come to his obituary, and as long as he was in life to that of his mother. They were also instructed to keep the lamp burning before the altar of St. Catharine the virgin, on the north side of the Blackfriars' Church, at certain hours in winter for six weeks, failure in these duties, unless hindered by fire, pestilence, famine, or civil war, involving forfeiture of a portion of the money. A house to the south of this building was mortified by Janet Kennedy, Lady Bothwell, to the Chaplain of St. Catharine's altar in Kirk of Field.<sup>1</sup>

Occupying the High Street frontage from Stevenlaw's Close eastward to Hunter Square—the site formerly of Peebles Wynd—there stood a magnificent building that had the reputation of being the most stately and sumptuous in the old town. This was the Black Turnpike. The tradition that Queen Mary lodged here on the evening of her memorable surrender at Carberry Hill has been effectually disproved by our townsman, Mr. Peter Miller, F.S.A. Scot, who has shown that the unhappy Queen's last night was spent in the house of Simon Preston, the Provost, on the site of the entrance to the Royal Exchange. But apart from this spurious fame, the Black Turnpike is celebrated on account of some interesting historical associations. As to the matter

<sup>1</sup> "Inventory of Pious Donations" in Advocates' Library.

of age there need be no dispute. Maitland found that in 1461 the edifice was conveyed to George Robertson of Lockhart, son of the builder, which would imply that it had been erected in the fifteenth century. Sir Daniel Wilson gives the additional information that in the following century it was acquired by George, Bishop of Dunkeld, who conferred it upon two of his illegitimate daughters; and that in 1693, when the administrators of Heriot's Hospital raised an action against Robert Hepburn of Bearford for a ground annual, it was known as Robertson's Inn.<sup>1</sup>

Whatever its earlier history may have been, the Black Turnpike towards the end of the sixteenth century came to be occupied simultaneously by various more or less well-known families of affluence. Several of these paid rents amounting to 100 merks, and, of course, money went much further at that time. Indeed, with the exception of "the common mills," in which a great deal of the wealth of the city was sunk, the Black Turnpike seems to have been perhaps the best property investment of the day. That this great mansion had no lack of accommodation may be inferred, not only from the rents, but, perhaps, also from the expression used when the house came to be subdivided—"a tenement of land within the tenement."

<sup>1</sup> Sasines in the Burgh Register for 1583 and 1587 call the building "Robesonis Innys"; and another, dated June 1593, refers to "the tenement of the late George Robeson."

Robert Abercrombie, king's saddler,<sup>1</sup> occupied one of the largest of the Black Turnpike mansions, and for a near neighbour had the "king's maister flesher." Abercrombie belonged to a well-known Scottish family, several of whom have risen to great eminence. His royal bills used to run up to £4000, but the Scots pound, of course, was only 1s. 8d. Sometimes, when there were dealings with the English Treasury, this monetary system led to very droll mistakes. An account made up in Scots money was, it is said, on more than one occasion discharged in sterling coin, and there is no record of any case where our "auld enemies" had their blunder pointed out. It was in this way that the ancestors of John Callander of Craigforth, advocate, acquired the family estate,<sup>2</sup> a piece of good fortune that throws an air of veracity around the story of the Perthshire farmer who sold a magnificent Tay pearl to an Englishman. The farmer sought £100 for his treasure, meaning, of course, the familiar £8 : 6 : 8, but the Englishman beat him down, and cheerfully enough handed over £70 sterling to the astonished Scot.

In the Black Turnpike also in 1593 is found

<sup>1</sup> Burgh Register, 1583 and 1592.

<sup>2</sup> The *Scots Magazine* in recording Callander's death in 1789 says: "This gentleman's ancestor acquired the estate by a curious mistake. Being farrier to King James VI. in Scotland, he made out his account in Scots money agreeable to practice, which, being sent to England, an order was made to pay it in sterling money. The family estate was bought with the money."

Mr. George Abercrombie, W.S.,<sup>1</sup>—a man who was “master of his profession,” as is implied by the prefix to his name.<sup>2</sup> Abercrombie was agent for the King’s Treasury, and excited the envy of a distinguished northern advocate named John Chiene, who attacked him during a business visit to Aberdeen, “wounded him in the hind heid,” and would have slain him had not “the providence of God and the help of certain ‘weill-willairis’ saved him.” Mr. Chiene was “a man of great respectability,” and for one year was a “dutiful, upright, and diligent” Provost of Aberdeen.<sup>3</sup>

Associated with another part of the Black Turnpike are the names of Lady Jean Colquhoun (whose husband, Sir Humphrey Colquhoun, was murdered by some of the Macfarlanes in a vault in his stronghold of Bannachrea), Lady Minto, and her spouse Sir Matthew Stewart of Minto.<sup>4</sup> Stewart acquired the Minto estate from the powerful family of the Turnbills, and subsequently sold it to Gilbert Elliot, the great ancestor of the present holder. We also learn that he was one of the Commissioners appointed in 1596 to inquire as to the fitness of a particular creek in Little Cumbrae to be a new harbour for the burgh of Irvine, the watermouth of which had become “overblawn and fillit with sand.” Robert Boyd of Badinhaith, to whom Stewart sur-

<sup>1</sup> Burgh Register.

<sup>2</sup> “Mr.” for M.A., see Laing’s edition of *Knox’s History*, vol. i. p. 566.

<sup>3</sup> Privy Council Records.

<sup>4</sup> Burgh Register, 1596.

rendered his house in the Black Turnpike,<sup>1</sup> owned a fortalice on the Little Cumbrae, and the Privy Council Records contain an amusing account of a successful raid on the island by lawless men of the Isles who objected to the harbour works.

In the latter half of the sixteenth century the Crichton family in and around the Black Turnpike formed almost a colony by themselves. One of the direct heirs of the old bishop was Mr. Abraham Crichton, Provost of Dunglass, a son of Lady Strathurd.<sup>2</sup> Abraham was one of the trustees for the Bishop of Orkney, who left 4000 merks to "big ane College in Edinburgh," and he himself was so far interested in local affairs that in his will, drawn up in the Castle of Edinburgh in 1565, he left 100 merks towards the repair of Cramond Brig, and a like sum for mending Magdalene Brig, near Musselburgh. These "brigs had great need of mending and reparation—one being already 'rewynit' and the other in danger of falling if it be not speedily helped."<sup>3</sup>

Without following much further the fortunes of this old Scottish family, it may be mentioned that George Crichton of Cluny, only son of the Provost of Dunglass and his wife Marion, were also connected with this ancient mansion.<sup>4</sup> The Crichtons were somewhat notorious for their rough wooing, and more than one daring adventure was undertaken by

<sup>1</sup> Burgh Register, 1596.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Privy Council Records.

<sup>4</sup> Burgh Register, 1583.

some of them when searching for a bride.<sup>1</sup> One of the tenements in the Black Turnpike was known in 1580 as Magdalene Land, and the rent was applied to the bedesmen and hospitallers of St. Mary Magdalene's Chapel in Cowgate. The right of patronage to the chaplainry was vested in George Mack, son of a distinguished writer in Edinburgh, who acquired it along with the house from George Knowis, a burghess of Aberdeen.<sup>2</sup>

Peebles Wynd stood on the site of Hunter Square, and used to be a favourite residential quarter with the bakers of Edinburgh, workshops and dwelling-houses being indiscriminately crowded together. Topham describes the experiences of a friend who went to live in one of these dark abodes in order to be near the centre of the town. Weak and emaciated by constant sweatings, the lodger consulted a doctor, and gave himself up a prey to despair. After drafting his will, he discovered that he was living above a bakery, and that the oven was directly under his bed—a circumstance fully accounting for his mysterious malady. The prominent part taken by the baxter lads in riots that from time to time plunged Edinburgh into more than mimic warfare is well known to readers of *The Heart of Midlothian*. Ever ready for a fight, whether in the cause of the oppressed or for mere love of mischief, these apprentices had perhaps occasionally more than their own share of notoriety. Wilder spirits, indeed, when any purpose

<sup>1</sup> Privy Council Records.

<sup>2</sup> Burgh Register, 1584-85.

was to be served, felt little compunction about making them a scapegoat. And so it was disguised as such that some aristocratic Porteous rioters strove to hide their identity, although even a frightened lady perceived they showed "breeding that could scarcely be learned at the oven's mouth." A baker's apprentice who had thoughtlessly caused a great conflagration in Peebles Wynd was burned alive at the Market Cross in 1585.

Marlin's Wynd, another dark alley situated in the neighbourhood of the Tron Church, contained several doorways and windows decorated with heraldic devices and pious mottoes, some of which it would appear came from other parts of the town. There is a tradition that the wynd bore the name of John Marlin, a Frenchman who was employed to causeway the High Street, and that by his own desire he was buried underneath the causeway in front of his house. To this tradition some colour was given by the stone outline of a coffin set into the ground at the entrance to the wynd, and of Maryleon's existence there is no doubt, as his name frequently appears in the title-deeds of the sixteenth century. The Frenchman's special industry gave rise to a new family name—that of Cassiemaker, and its abbreviated form Cassie.

Prior to 1560 the Meal Market was situated at the head of Marlin's Wynd, after which it was removed to the Cowgate, and finally, in 1716, to the Grassmarket. In the eighteenth century nothing provoked more rioting than the scarcity of meal, particularly during the period commencing with the civic



reign of George Drummond, and ending with that of Sir James Hunter Blair, whose name is so closely identified with the improvements in this district. Long after these riots had ceased Mr. Joseph Thomson of Norton Hall, Eildon, bequeathed to poor householders in Edinburgh the privilege of obtaining a limited supply of oatmeal at 10d., when the price exceeded 1s. per peck.

Regarding the future of the interesting district with which this work deals, little need be said. The Town Council have in contemplation schemes involving the removal of almost every vestige of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and—in the event of Bailie Macpherson's idea being adopted—the substitution of terraces of model working-class houses, with their chief access from Blair Street. While the front blocks facing High Street and Cowgate remain intact, the area between Borthwick's Close and Hunter Square will practically be gutted. The improvement of an insanitary district and the building of working-men's houses in the very heart of the city are at all times important undertakings, and the inauguration of such a scheme during the reign of Lord Provost Russell, a medical man, a sanitarian, and a philanthropist, is a matter for sincere congratulation.

## APPENDIX

### A—THE NAME OF EDINBURGH

“DR. SKENE, in an elaborate note to the ‘Gododin’ poem, in his edition of the *Four Ancient Books of Wales*, demonstrates that the battle or series of fights described in the ‘Gododin’ and other poems were fought prior to the beginning of the seventh century. In the early text of that poem, in the Welsh language the name-word Eydden or Eiddlen occurs repeatedly as applicable to Edinburgh long before Edwin usurped the crown of Ida’s race. Skene further says : ‘In a poem of the Book of Taliessin there is the expression Rhuing Dineiddyn ac Dineiddwg, where Dineiddyn can hardly be anything but Dunedin ;’ that is equally clear from a poem in the *Black Book of Caermarthen*, where Edinburgh is called Mynydd Eidden. Coming down to a later period, the eighth, ninth, and tenth centuries, the same name-word occurs in several historical books contained in the *Myvyrian Archaeology of Wales*. In the *Bonedd y Saint* and the *Bonedd Saint Ynys Priddain* the same spelling is met with, Ddin Eiddin, dinas Eidin—odinas Eiden—Mynyddawg Eiddyn,—all meaning the Edin town or Dun. In the *Pictish Chronicle* it is said Indulphus held the kingdom eight years, and in his time from 953 to 961 the city Eden was vacated, and remained to the Scots to this day. This Chronicle was written about 1020. This refers to an event that

took place only a few years before the statement was written, and the writer was in all likelihood cognisant of the fact, and there is no reason to suppose that the name of the town had undergone any change during the short period that had elapsed from the event itself."<sup>1</sup>—"Edinburgh: its Name and Name-Word," by Peter Miller, F.S.A. Scot., *Proceedings of the Society*, 1889, pp. 323-27.

### B—THE CITY WAITS

While the sheets were passing through the press the City Chamberlain brought under notice an interesting petition from the City Waits, dated 1701. There were, it seems, four waits who performed at somewhat untimely hours. For this service they and their predecessors had been in the habit of receiving from the town an allowance of £10 proportionally among them, as also a livery cloak each yearly, on the ground that "it was not only a decorum to the good town, but very helpful and useful for discovering fire if any should happen, and for apprehending and disturbing thieving or other abuses about that time in the morning." Their allowance had fallen into abeyance, and they had got no new cloak since Provost Chiesley retired from office eight years before. The petitioners were declared to be "town waits or haut-boys," and were instructed to "yearly begin their usual play upon the first Tuesday morning of October, and continue every morning, except Sabbath and days of humiliation, until the 11th of March thereafter." The town livery was to be worn "only within the bounds and privileges thereof," and all others were prohibited from exercising the office.

<sup>1</sup> In Dunfermline *Chartulary*, the earliest as to date (Alexander's, 1107-24), the word is spelt Edinburg; Edinburg is simply the Saxon equivalent of the Gaelic Dunedin.

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