

Glasgow's Prandial Favourite about 1795.

FACE CLUB.

IT was a little after the period, but under the same peculiarities incident to the time and to the social condition of Glasgow which characterised the sittings of the Accidental Club, that another most joyous group of citizens were wont to plant their thread-hosed limbs beneath the mahogany of a worthy hostess of the Cross. The name by which this notable fraternity was known, not only to themselves but to the town, was the FACE—by no means a bad quality for either a man or a body of men to make way with in the world. Perhaps some may be curious to know why so strange an epithet should have been chosen as the link of its union and congeniality. Let it not be imagined, however, by any one deeply versed in the papers of the *Tatler* and *Spectator*, that the term indicated that each member was necessarily gifted with the fair features of an Antinous, or the hideous lineaments of a Gorgon—that, in short, the epithet indicated any generalising peculiarity of visage. No, truly; such a bond of union was never dreamed of by the rising merchants, the *blue and white corks*, leading shopkeepers, and comfortable craftsmen, who nightly quaffed their limited allowance in *Lucky Black's* tavern, and drew in their chairs to a weekly dinner, so soon as the music bells had ceased to tinkle, from the Cross steeple, “The flowers of the forest.”* The appellation arose simply from the circumstance of each member, on this dinner-day, having continually placed before him a full-fed smoking sheep's head, whose well-

* Mrs Black's tavern was down a long close at the head of the Gallowgate, south side. It was a thatched house of two stories or flats; the best rooms were in the upper

story. She was famous not only for sheep-heads, but also, and most particularly, for beef-steaks, black puddings, and “a skirl in the pan.”

sized *face*, by paying regular toll to every member's mouth through which it passed, was destined to bestow an unwrinkled smoothness to the phizzes of these Glasgow gourmands.*

The Face Club, which was holding its sittings during the final decade of the last and first few years of the present century, had rather a numerous list of names on its muster roll; and hence, there were never less than fifteen to twenty sheep-heads seen smoking on the board at every dinner-meeting of the brotherhood. What a glorious study it must have afforded to the physiognomists of the past, and might have opened up to the phrenologists of the present age! What an insight it might have given to the scientific world anent the sources of ovine meekness! One thing is certain, that all the specimens which were there paraded were such as to give the best idea of that race of animals to the seat of whose intelligence the Club was so devotedly attached.

Among the most regular attendants of the Face Club was Mr Andrew Taylor—the nephew of the worthy caligrapher whom we have already attempted to sketch—and who was better known among his companions by the sobriquet of the *Cub*. To a joyous nature, this rather singular dominie united a most sarcastic disposition; and, when rallied, not unfrequently, by several members of the fraternity, was discovered to be by no means a simple customer. He was in the habit of letting fly his shafts of ridicule right and left, and alike on friend and foe; but being a privileged individual, much was tolerated from him that would not have been permitted from others. The truth is, his presence gave an agreeable acidity to the conversation of the Club, which perhaps otherwise would have been more commonplace; and hence his sarcastic countenance was always welcomed, with more than ordinary gusto, at the Face board. His sarcastic style of talking, however, was not confined to the Club, but frequently displayed itself in the school-room; here he could of course give full scope to his nature, without much dread of giving offence. As

* Among some of the early and higher class members were the Messrs Watsons, the bankers, Robert Young, John Berry, &c.

an example of many sallies in which he there indulged, we may mention that, on the afternoon before some coming Christmas, one of the boys, who rather bore the character of the bird from which his pen had been plucked, having said—"I suppose, Mr Taylor, we'll hae the play the morn to eat our goose?" The master at once replied, "Ou, ay, man, Robin; but there has been sic a slaughter o' thae animals, I wonder that you hae escaped!" It appears it was on this same Robin that he liked to play off his wit; for it is also told, that while this boy was one evening mending his pen by candle-light (no gas then), he happened to singe his hair, when the master, coming up to him from his desk, remarked, "Lord, Bob, that pickle birse of yours has made as meikle smell as if it had been a hale sheep's head!" Of course on these and such like occasions, the laugh from the boys was, like the landlord's laugh, "a ready chorus."*

When we consider the number of ovine countenances which were required to meet the necessities of one Club sederunt, it will be seen that it was no easy matter at that period for the landlady to fulfil the duties which were weekly laid upon her. But, perhaps with all her anxious wishes and endeavours to do what was hebdomally required, she might have failed, had she not had a worthy deacon of the marrow-bone and cleaver corporation, and an equally worthy deacon of the hammerman, as regular members of the fraternity. To the former she ever applied in her hour of need, and rarely failed to obtain all which her own heart and his palate desired; while to the latter, she was sure she could trust her own *head*, far more

* Mr Andrew Taylor, though a good teacher, became in after life perhaps rather too fond of social excitement, and consequently his classes fell off. It was his invariable practice to dine out on Saturday, and he rarely reached home on that day by the most direct road, and when he did so, it was with some difficulty that he found his way into bed. It appears, too, that he had little recollection next day how he had done so, and accordingly it is scarcely surprising that, on one occasion, after returning home and going to bed, on a Saturday night, well

"refreshed," he happened to waken up in a hurry on hearing the clock strike in the morning, and forgetting the day of the week, rung his bell violently, and on his servant coming, cried out, "Jenny, Jenny, bring shaving water as fast as possible; what will the boys say and me no at the schule?" "Oh! Maister Taylor," said the domestic, "it's the Sabbath-day!" "The Sabbath-day!" quoth the dominie,—“Glorious institution the Sabbath!” and forthwith turned himself round for another snooze.

her *sheep-heads*, without fear of other damage than was absolutely necessary to fit the latter for the broth-pot! For months and years this Club pursued, under all the landlady's difficulties, the even tenor of its prandial way, until, one fatal Saturday, a circumstance occurred which threw a momentary cloud over the usual hilarity and good humour of the brotherhood. It was in the trying moment, which was never afterwards forgotten, when the president discovered that the *tongue* of the standard dish which stood smoking before him was *non est inventus*, and when each member caught with masonic quickness the president's look of horror, and turned his eye on his own smoking platter. Alas! the little troublesome member was found a general absentee, and its absence gave instant mettle to the tongues of the astonished fraternity! Ernulphus' vocabulary of damning epithets was nothing to the shower that fell from a score of disappointed lips, upon the butcher, the smith, the hostess, the startled maid—a shower which only fairly ceased when the punch-tied tongues of each *Highgate* dog became "unable to take up the cumbrous word." The deacon of the cleaver allowed not a moment to pass, after the fatal discovery, before he lisped out, as he was wont, "'Tis these thieves o' smiths!" although it was more than insinuated by the representative of Vulcan, that an unusual demand at that time for these tid-bits, for some great civic feast, pointed out more truly the burglar! What a glorious sketch the Face Club would have afforded, for the pencil of Phiz or Cruickshank, under the effects of that trying moment!

With the exception of this single mistake, however, it appears pretty certain that, up to the last day on which the fraternity assembled around the sheep-head board, there was never anything seen akin to this ovine Babel or *dispersion of tongues*. Had it again occurred, the expulsion of both deacons from the Club would have been a certain consequence. The members of the Face belonged, as we have hinted, to that comfortable and rising class of citizens who were destined to win the highest places in the City, and were characterised, moreover, as a band of most joyous rogues. It is not too much to say, that their gibes, their jokes,

and their flashes of merriment would have given employment to a dozen of reporters at a sitting, and well repaid them for their trouble, particularly if the said reporters could have made themselves invisible! It was indeed a Club where Momus held each week his laughing carnival. Alas! how few, if any, are now left to wag the tongue each wagged so glibly for lack of one!

The Face survived only a few years longer than the century which gave it birth. Most of the ruddy countenances which so often had grinned with delight over the stumbling-block of Winifred Jenkins, have now, as Hamlet says, "none to mock their grinning;" and were it not that we are occasionally reminded of its existence by partaking of the ligament of its union, either on a Sunday at home, or at the annual dinner of the Society of the Sons of the Clergy, in George-square, and thereby recalling the traits and tales of several of the long-departed members of the Club, we should perhaps never have dreamed of becoming its unworthy annalist.*

* At the Sons of the Clergy dinner in Glasgow, there are always four standard Scotch dishes paraded; and which, *not* strange to say, attract even more attention than the more fashionable specimens of French and English cookery. The four dishes are—a haggis, a sheep's head, tripe, and black puddings. There is perhaps no assembly of a convivial kind in Glasgow that has been more characterised by everything that can make man happy, than the meeting of the Sons of the Clergy. Filled with the spirit of benevolence and philanthropy, and replete with the recollections of the innocent and joyous pastimes of the manse, the Sons of the Church sit down to their annual well-covered board with common sympathies and common interests, and moreover, with the conviction that their efforts have that day done something to soothe the sorrows of their less fortunate brethren and sisters. The society was instituted in 1798, and was then incorporated by a seal of cause from the

Magistrates and Council, for the purpose of rendering pecuniary aid to the children of clergymen who might be reduced to indigent circumstances. The funds are now considerable; and hence, at every March meeting, the Managers are enabled to distribute much substantial relief. At its outset, the society was much indebted to the liberal contributions of the Oswald family, and to the business talent of Dr Porteous; and in latter days, to the kindness of Miss Paisley, and the unwearied care of the venerable Principal Macfarlan. Many excellent citizens have been members of this benevolent fraternity; and among those who in their day and generation have added their mite of merriment and jest & jocularity to these meetings, we cannot forget the big-hearted Samuel Hunter, the facetious Fredrick Adamson, the sprightly Jack Duncan, the joyous minded Dr William Gibb, and many others of a Momus-loving character.