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Our street : memories of

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# OUR STREET

MEMORIES OF  
BUCCLEUCH PLACE

Edinburgh

JAMES THIN, PUBLISHER TO THE UNIVERSITY

1893

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## OUR STREET.



WE have imagined that we may derive some pleasure and possibly some profit from some sketches of what we were, and what we did, and what our companions and neighbours were, in a time which to some of us appears as yesterday, but which to some of the younger among us must appear a long time ago. We do not pretend to have anything at all remarkable to tell, or any stirring tales to relate,—all we desire is to show some pictures of the ordinary life in that part where our lot was cast in our early days; and we do not expect to create any interest in the people who moved

in Our Street in these days, as if there were anything extraordinary about them. They were just the common type of people, men and boys, probably in almost every respect the same as those who have taken their places. But that which interests is not generally "the wonderful," but that with which every one of us can sympathise, because we have gone through the same ourselves, the simple story of the lives of people like ourselves.

On looking back over more than half-a-century, what chiefly strikes us is the great march of improvement in provision made for the comfort of the people during that time. Within that period is comprised the introduction into our houses of water, and soil pipes, of gas and all the subsidiary appliances and luxuries which we receive along with and from these.



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Within that period have been introduced cabs, omnibuses, railways, and tramways. The postage of letters has been made low enough to bring correspondence within the reach of all ; and a literature has been created which brings to us all in a shape which we can understand the science which half-a-century ago was confined to a few learned men. It is worthy of our earnest consideration, seeing that we have much more knowledge, whether we are wiser than our fathers were, for knowledge and wisdom are by no means synonymous ; and seeing that we can do innumerable things to benefit our minds for which they had no opportunity, and that we enjoy very superior advantages as compared with them, whether we are in any respect better than our fathers were.

OUR STREET was not a fashionable street, it had none of the aristocracy living in it. Jeffrey had lived three flights up a stair in it not long before our time, but he was then only a struggling Advocate. Nobody belonging to the street kept a carriage of any higher pretensions than a gig, except the medical man who succeeded "the doctor" of whom we have to speak afterwards, who set up a one horse phaeton, which used to thunder up the street at all sorts of untimeous hours. But the street was very respectable; the houses in it were good, roomy dwellings, well suited for families; and on the Malthusian principle that children come where circumstances are suitable for their maintenance, the families in Our Street were numerous, and each family as a rule large. The street had been built when people had a recollection

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of the advantages of the lofty buildings in the Old Town, and the houses were all "flats" piled one above another, entering from common stairs. The houses on the larger part of one side of the street had seven separate floors, on all the rest of the street there were six. Some of the stairs admitted to one house only on the flat, but some admitted to two houses, one alongside of the other; and it may be conceived that a stair which was common to from six to twelve separate houses, each inhabited by a large family, was a pretty lively thoroughfare, requiring a good deal of arrangement to keep in anything like order. A consequence of the close proximity of the dwellings was that neighbours were forced to make common arrangements, which involved common interests, and hence there was a

certain amount of acquaintance and neighbourly feeling.

In our stair, when we recollect it first,—that is to say, at the earliest period to which our memory can stretch,—there were five families, the first entering from what was called the “street door,” inhabiting the street flat and the basement, and four families of us “up the stair.” There were five lads in the street door house,—first and last there were eight children in our family; there were five children immediately above us, six above that, and a recently married couple at the top who had made a fair start with twins. The lads at the foot went to the High School, as did all the boys of a suitable age, the other boys and girls to schools, chiefly Andrew’s and Lennie’s, where excellent education was given, but where there was

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what would now-a-days be called a sad mixture of classes. Every house and most of the individual flats had each its own back green, separated by stone walls. These walls were the favourite playground of both boys and girls, and "Tig on the Dykes" was, if a dangerous, yet a very exciting play. When we look back on it, it is with wonder that serious accidents did not often occur; when we consider a troop of boys, and generally as many girls, running about at full speed on the tops of walls, leaping from wall to wall across the lanes which led between, and these walls never under five feet high and sometimes eight to ten feet, some with flat copes, some with round, and in some cases covered with broken glass (which, however, we soon removed).

True, there were many falls, but we generally

managed to fall on our heads, which were pretty hard ; and if we did tear our nether garments, they had many a time been torn before, and showed in various quarters, and always on both knees, the laborious care of our much enduring mothers. The landings of the common stairs were our play places when the weather was too wet for out-door sports. Some of the stairs had fine roomy landings, which we believed were purposely made for our playing on at bools or peeries, and we have often since wondered at the patience of the people and of their servants, who had the cleaning to do, enduring uncomplainingly our noise and the soiling of their carefully washed passages. We remember well when four of us one wet Saturday were enjoying a game at bools on the first landing of our stair, No. 7, how there came a carpenter-like man who informed us he was going to

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repair the window sashes. He engaged affably in conversation with us while he took off the lining and took out the sashes, then kindly allowed us to help them on to his shoulders, and in a fatherly manner advising us not to play there any longer lest we should catch cold, went off with the window sashes, and neither he nor they were ever seen or heard of more.

About that time lucifer matches were invented. People before then managed to get a light by flint and steel ; striking a spark into a tinder box, and from that igniting a "spunk" tipped with brimstone. My cousin and I had got, by some extraordinary luck, a shilling, which we spent at Melrose's shop on the South Bridge, on a box of the new matches, which had two bits of sand-paper to each box, through which we drew the matches. We got

our box one Saturday, and sat on the stair alternately drawing the matches and seeing them blaze. I fear that at the end we thought we had paid dear for our whistle, but it was grand fun while it lasted.

When we recall to memory the men and women whose faces were familiar in "Our Street," the first that rises before us is "the DOCTOR." The Doctor was a clean shaved little man, with spectacles, exceedingly gentle in his manner, and had a large family, the boys of which were as romping and wild as their father was mild. He never dreamed of such a luxury as a carriage, and, seeing that there was no connection in these days between the interiors of the houses and the drains, and consequently no diphtheria nor typhoid fever, his work was chiefly in the obstetric branch of his profession, varied occasionally by a little measles or hooping cough.



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We can remember vividly how, in the winter of 1831, our parents used to scan the tri-weekly *Courant* or the bi-weekly *Scotsman* to learn the progress of the dreaded cholera *morbis*, which with steady step was approaching our shores from the far East, until at length it reached our own land, and after slaying many victims in Sunderland and along the coast to Fisherrow, laid its deadly grasp on some in our own city. We can remember the bags of camphor which we wore, and the smell of the burning tar barrels in Our Street to ward off infection, and the feeling of general alarm when it was known that several cases had occurred in the street next to ours, inhabited by a somewhat lower or poorer class. One day as we went to school one of the boys remarked "David Somerville is ill," "What of?" was the general question—it was not known, but the

doctor had been sent for. When we returned from school David was no better, and the doctor had gone for Dr Abercrombie to consult. We boys watched the coming of the great doctor, and waited till they two came out, and we saw Dr Abercrombie say something to our doctor which made him look aghast. That night David died, next day the doctor was ill, and within not many hours was dead. We then learned that he had told Dr Abercrombie that David's symptoms completely puzzled him, and had received the answer, What! do you not know that it is a case of Asiatic Cholera? and that from that moment he felt himself in the grasp of the disease. The boys watched from the windows the funerals of David Somerville and Dr White; and these two deaths coming close to our own doors, and among our own folks, made the year of

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the cholera a memorable one in Our Street. On the succeeding Sunday there were few dry eyes in the chapel as the minister spoke of the striking deaths of those we had known so well, and urged on us that the way to ward off danger, and the way to be prepared for danger were the same, to live the life of a Christian.

“The MINISTER” was a bachelor; how he had escaped matrimony it was not easy to see, for he was of a very amiable disposition, very anxious to do a kindness to any one, and many a lady had gone as far as she, with propriety, could in courting him, but he had never disoblged the many by marrying one, and he continued a bachelor to the end under the sway of his housekeeper Peggy.

The minister lived near the top of the street. The pavement in front of his house was well

suited for the game of bools, and very often there was a cluster of boys there crying "Nickle dead—nae taw," to the great annoyance of Peggy who would come out of the area door and order them off, or "she would let the minister hear of it." But the boys knew very well that the minister would never say a word about it. There was a fine jargonelle pear tree against the house in the minister's back green, and one day just previous to the breaking up of the schools for the vacation there was a rumour that the tree had been partially robbed. It was soon discovered who were the culprits, for though stolen waters are sweet, stolen jargonelles in July are certain producers of cholic. One of the two who had stolen the pears was a fine, good-natured, impulsive boy, a near neighbour of the minister. He felt much ashamed of what he had joined in doing, and

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*he* hoped, and *we* who knew of it hoped that the minister would know nothing either of the robbery or of who had done it. However, when in the middle of August the pears were ripe, a basket was sent with the minister's compliments to Mrs Bryson, the mother of our friend, begging her acceptance of a few jargonelles for all the family except Robert, who had enjoyed his share already.

Robert little knew that the minister had seen it all, but waited the proper time till he could administer at once his joke and his reproof. Any one who saw the minister's portly figure and happy countenance would conclude that he enjoyed a fair share of the good things of this life, and was generally at home either in his own house or somewhere as comfortable at dinner-time. And we remember one afternoon as the dinner hour drew on, and we were

playing bools on our favourite ring, that an old woman passed along, and sniffing the fragrance of roast mutton from the kitchen just down the area steps, stopped and contemplatively said, "Ay; he was aye a weel living lad, Peter Clason." A well living man he was truly in every sense of the term; seldom do we meet in with so true and thorough a Christian gentleman.

If the boys all liked the minister and liked to feel his kindly hand on their heads as he passed, they had as cordial a disliking for another equally well-known member of the street community, commonly called "THE KING."

The King lived in a house, No. 6, next to a lane which ran at right angles to the street, and which was a great resort for playing ball against the gables of the houses on each side.

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It naturally happened that as these gables had windows in them, the ball sometimes went through a pane, and very likely the King had endured loss at various times in his own windows; any way, he was a determined opponent of all games at ball or shinty in that lane, and the boys had to keep clear when he was at hand. He had a pompous, gruff manner, and a habit of speaking what he considered the truth, even when that was very disagreeable, and all the more, perhaps, when he knew that it would be disagreeable. We remember enjoying much hearing our father tell how at a Merchant Company dinner the King overheard a remark made by a man who thought himself something, but of whose intellect the King had a very low opinion, and how in a lull of the conversation the King's voice was heard by all at the table addressing

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the unfortunate object of his wrath. "O Jamie, Jamie man! that great big mouth of yours was ne'er made for anything but stap-  
ping a spoon into." One cause why we boys feared the King, was that whenever he got an opportunity he posed us with fickle questions from the Shorter Catechism, or if he were by any chance in our house and we within his reach, we got an unmerciful overhauling on some point of history, or geography which we ought to have known but which would not come to memory under his stern examination. It was, however, a comfort to us to see that as he dealt with the boys so he dealt with their seniors, and that he administered his catechising and his rebukes pretty equally all round. He took his fair share of public work, and made a good Bailie, although the culprits complained that he gave them too much rebuke



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along with their punishment, and altogether King Thomson was a useful man in his generation.

In No. 3, at the foot of the street, some doors down from "the King," lived a man who was regarded as a mystery. That he was a man of untold wealth every boy knew, in fact he was our impersonification of Cræsus, for was his name not written on all the notes of the Bank of Scotland, as the George Sandy to whom or to bearer the bank promised to pay one pound sterling or one hundred pounds sterling as the case might be? How rich must he be to whom the bank owed all this untold sum of money? It was said that he was a miser, and certainly he spent little of his fabulous wealth on dress, for at a time when one of the glories of a man lay in his ruffled shirt and display of linen, he was always seen

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in a shirt which appeared to have served him for a week for wear both by day and by night. Nobody ever went with him. Nobody was seen to enter his house except his one servant, an old woman, compared to whom for temper the minister's Peggy was a saint. Then it was said he was an Atheist, and we looked at him with bated breath as he passed going to or coming from the Bank. A boy's bonnet had been thrown into his area, and the old woman took it prisoner, and there was nothing for it but to beard the mystery in his den, and ask him to give the boy back his bonnet. Two boys accordingly rang the bell and asked to see Mr Sandy, and were shown into a room round which were ranged on shelves books so many, and so valuable as the boys believed were never seen in a private library before. As they stood in fear and

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trembling waiting for the dreaded man, he opened the door and pleasantly asked them what he could do for them. They told him their errand, when he rang the bell, ordered the bonnet to be given them, and courteously requested that they would avoid ruffling the temper of his servant, who was somewhat old and easily annoyed.

After this the boys maintained that he was neither Miser nor Atheist, but a man who had sustained a disappointment in love, and whose life had been made a blank, throwing him for companionship on his books alone. Some said he was a Misanthrope. What that meant we had no conception, but we thought it must be something dreadful, and we could not think so hardly of him as all that.

Everybody in the street knew DEACON

MURRAY. He had been a baker, tolerably successful in business, had been for some time Deacon of his Craft, and in consequence a member of the old Town Council; and he had enlarged his mind by obtaining a house and piece of land near West Calder, where, in the autumn months he shot, and in the stream close by he used to fish when he could, as he frequently did, take a holiday from business. The Deacon was a shrewd, pawky chiel, and he used his agricultural knowledge to guide him in speculations in wheat; for every baker in these days bought and milled his own wheat, and, as foreign grain was almost precluded from being imported, the markets were ruled by the state of the crops in our own country. He used to go about in the grey Kerseymeres which bakers affected because they did not show the flour; with

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a blue coat and brass buttons, and usually a spencer over that of a rougher blue cloth. His money was invested chiefly in house property, so that he was not altogether devoid of occupation, even when he had altogether retired from business; but he had plenty of leisure time which he was glad to spend in walking up and down the street or the Meadow Walks, or in sitting on the Meadow seats if he could get a companion to have a crack with,—the burden of which crack was sure to be the weather and the crops, and it would glide backwards to a comparison of what the weather and the crops were then, compared with what they used to be, and the comparison was sure to be always unfavourable to the present. This would lead to other comparisons, where the present came out badly as contrasted with

the past, and the matter would be wound up with a sigh, "Heh hum, this country is done."

If he were in congenial society, more especially over a moderate tumbler of toddy, which he called, "Auld Man's Milk," he would tell of the manner of doing business in the Town Council when he was the Deacon, which was very superior to that of these degenerate days. He could tell of what he knew from the narrative of those who had been Deacons at the time; how the ground called Warrender Park was granted off the borough lands by the Town Council to the Lord Provost, Sir John Warrender, for no money price, but because of his kindness and hospitality; how at the meeting where this transaction was closed, the Council were all below the table; but

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one, the Deacon of the Cordiners, was not so drunk but that he could understand what was being done, and he made such a row that to stop his mouth, Sir John and the Clerk had to give him a narrow corner at the West End, which he called Viewpark.

The Deacon had many stories to tell of the actings of the Council in his own day. How the bell rope at the Town Guard-house broke, and they required three meetings and three suppers to settle what length should be chain and what length rope. How after one of these sederunts in "John's" Coffee-house, as they came down the High Street to the Tron Church, the moon shone brightly and the Tron Church appeared to be greatly off the perpendicular. How the Deacons, invested with the cares of office, saw it to be their duty to

give the church a hearty shove to make it right; for which end they took off their coats and laid them down, and applied their shoulders with right good will, always retiring a little now and then to see what the effect was. How, after a while they thought the mischief was mended, and that they might put on their coats. But some thief had meantime walked off with these, and they could not be found, but how the Deacon of the Glovers, old Mr Gladow, explained it in a moment, "Eh, sirs, but ou've shoved weel, ou've covered our coats."

The Deacon used to tell of his old friend Tommy Kerr the glover in the South Bridge; how, when the great fire was, he went to Tommy's shop and told him the Parliament House was afire, and proposed that they should go and have a look. "Fegs, no,"



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said Tommy, "oull seed all in the *Courant* the morn"; but, said the Deacon, when the Tron Kirk took fire, he saw it all for naething frae his ain shop door, and he got an awful fright.

It is questionable whether the boys were most afraid of King Thomson or of ROGER THE MEADOW-MAN. Close by Our Street are extensive meadows which belong to the Corporation, and which at that time, a quagmire in summer, were our great resort in winter for sliding on the ice. The Meadows were fenced round with wooden posts and rails which were covered with pitch, and, as to get to the grass or ice as the case might be, we had to climb over the rails, our nether garments and the pitch were very frequently in contact with each other. *Now* we understand that Roger must

have been employed by the Corporation to gather in the rents drawn for cattle feeding or clothes drying on the grass. *Then* we believed that he and his dog were employed for no other purpose but to chase and persecute us when on the forbidden ground. *Now* we know that the pitch was applied to preserve the rails, *then* we were fully assured in our own minds that it was altogether a diabolical invention, whereby it was secured that if we escaped Roger and his dog we should be punished at home for the destruction of our clothes, which generally were forcible examples of the adage, "that a man, and far less a boy, cannot touch pitch without being defiled." But neither Roger and his dog nor paternal lickings could keep us off the Meadows. Was there not a broad and deep ditch called the

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“Stank,” down the centre, where in summer we fished for sticklebacks which we called “Mennins,” with a thread at the end of a stick and a worm at the end of the thread? Was it not a proud boast if we could with a race jump across the Stank, and did we not, when sore pressed by Roger and his dog, try the venturous leap, preferring to be soused over head and ears in the mud rather than be left to their tender mercies? And were there ever such slides as in winter were to be had on this Stank and the many pools all over the meadow? Roger and his dog, pailings and pitch, Stank and slides have all been abolished, but we question if any of the hundreds who disport themselves on the green sward now, have a tithe of the enjoyment which we had in that forbidden swamp.

Between the lower part of the street and the Meadows, was and is the Archer's Hall, with its beautiful bowling green and garden and range of butts for archery practice. Next the butts and opening to the Meadows at the foot of Boroughloch Lane was Peter Muir's workshop, where he produced the bows and arrows required by the corps, and for which Peter was famed, and had a large demand from England.

In the Meadows in front of the butts the targets were pitched on shooting days, and through the garden from the Hall, and through Peter's workshop the archers marched to their exercise, in an undress green frock coat on ordinary days, and in full uniform with plumed bonnets and short Roman swords on high days and competitive occasions.

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Peter and his assistant marched before and took up their positions beside the targets at each end, and there they indicated by a telegraphic code with little flags which they waved, the result of each shot.

The old men who sat on the stone seats watching them had not much faith in the virtue of the corps as the King's Body Guard for Scotland, and their remarks on the shooting were generally disparaging. We heard Deacon Murray remark to Mr Sym, "Timothy Tickler" of the *Noctes Ambrosianae*, one Saturday, "I think if I were Peter I would aye stand richt in front of the target; a body would be safest there."

For a time a tall mast with a figure of a bird on the top, a "popinjay," was introduced as a variety from the targets, but it did not seem to take permanent place.

When Charles the Tenth of France was living in exile at Holyrood, his suite used to shoot along with the archers. I do not remember of the king himself sharing the sport, but there was a podgy little youth, to whom much deference seemed to be paid, who was styled the Duc de Bordeaux, and was considered the nearest heir to the king. He was afterwards well known as the Comte de Paris, and, as in the eyes of the orthodox legitimist Monarchists, the King of France.

The king and his suite did not make any mark in Edinburgh society; it was, however, interesting to us schoolboys to have pointed out to us the men whose names were known in the French history of the time, and who, we were told, might come to the front again.

It was announced in the newspapers that the French Court was leaving Holyrood, and

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that their furniture was to be sold by auction. My father and my uncle went to the sale, chiefly from curiosity, but partly to see if they could pick up any unconsidered trifle cheap, which might have a value from its historic interest. The article they purchased was a piece of furniture unknown in Scotland, a gout-stool, with two long legs and two short ones, and a rest at the low end. The stool was christened "Charlie," and has been the parent of a numerous family copied from it.

Of the boys who played with us, many have left their mark on our memory which can never be effaced. We mentioned David Somerville who was cut down by cholera, and of whom the minister's Peggy remarked, that it was easy to know why he was selected to be a warning to us all, for he was the only good boy in the street, the only one ready

to be taken away; and another death will never be forgotten by any of the boys. Jamie M'Laren was a quiet and not very bright boy who lived at the top of a stair, No. 31, the only son of a widow, and whose company we did not much care for, because he liked to hang about the stables in a back lane, the boys belonging to which stables were apt to take the part of the "Keelies," our natural enemies, when we had a bicker or fight with stones, which was pretty often.

Some injudicious friend had presented one of our boys, Alick Lawrie, with a toy cannon mounted on wheels, which was too large to be used for boy's play. The Lawries' back-green had a door leading to the stable lane, and one day, just before the king's birthday, Alick proceeded to load his cannon with powder and slugs, and to try its power



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against this door. He never thought that Jamie M'Laren or any other was in the lane just behind, nor, if he knew that, did he dream of the slugs penetrating the door; but so it was, just as the din of the cannon was heard by the hostlers in the lane, they saw Jamie turn heels over head and lie senseless. One of the slugs had entered his forehead. For weeks he lay between death and life. So anxious were the boys to know how he did, that a daily bulletin had to be pasted on the door. At length, he died just when strong hopes had been raised of his recovery, and we all mourned for him as a brother, forgetting in his melancholy fate the coolness which had been between us in his life.

We mourned too for Alick Lawrie. Would he be tried and hanged as a murderer? The police had come and taken away the cannon;

would they come now and take Alick away also?

The poor lad never was himself again, he never again played with the other boys, and his mother took so much to heart the accident which made her son a manslayer that she too sickened, and in a few months was dead.

Big cannon were not a favourite toy in Our Street from that time.

One other death was burned into the memory of every boy in the street. It is many long years ago, and yet at this day I can hardly speak of it, and the memory of it and of him who died is as fresh as it was that day. Nicholas Whitehead was the most lovable boy among us. Not highest in his class, but not far below the highest, not remarkable for any of the accomplishments which make boys look up to the possessors

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of them as leaders ; but a pleasant, unselfish, gentle companion, ever ready to help, a constant friend, and one who would do much to save a careless boy from scrapes. When at the Academy a prize was given to the best boy in the school, to be decided by the votes of all the boys, Nicholas and George Torrance were equal in votes, and only Nicholas remained unpolled—he unhesitatingly gave his vote, and with it the prize to George Torrance.

Nicholas had got the present of some young pigeons, and had fitted up for them a meat safe, which hung at a window looking into a lane next the house. The safe was one of those erections of wood and hair-cloth which can be swung round to the open window.

Here he was one day feeding and playing

with his pigeons, when he over-balanced himself and fell two stories to the ground. When taken up he was dead.

We can hear yet the shriek of his mother when she saw the body of her son. We remember as yesterday the anxious consultation who was to tell his father, and how it was to be broken to him. We seem to feel yet the hush that was in the school, and to hear the sobs as Mr Sym, the young, earnest minister who had been *his* minister, addressed the boys on the awful event. We remember as yesterday, how the day before the funeral, the Master, Mr Gunn, told the boys he was going to the funeral, and all who wished might go—and how with tearful eyes, and unaffected woe, the whole school walked to the grave in the Newington Cemetery. He was my

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closest companion, and his loss left a blank which has never been filled up.

The hero of the street was Walter Oliphant. I do not remember of any occasion in which Walter was mixed up with any piece of malicious mischief. Some of the big boys played cruel tricks on the little boys: Walter never went in with that, nor was such a thing done when he was present. But on Saturday excursions, at shinty, and always at a bicker, Walter was the undisputed leader. Some of us can recall delightful days spent at Blackford and Braid, and some especially in the glen where Braid Hermitage is.

It was Walter who directed the "locale" of the excursions, it was he who arranged all the proceedings, and every boy trusted implicitly to his direction. At shinty he always "clipped on one side," and kept the "hale," and the

side which had him for leader was pretty sure to win. And then at a bicker! we would not be at all sure of venturing a bicker except Walter were there, but with him we had no fear. We might get our heads broken,—they were many a time that; we might get our teeth broken, as nearly all mine were once by a stone which came at the unlucky moment when my mouth was open; but for all that we were sure of beating the keelies, even although they had Sergeant White Breeks with them. Even Walter looked on Sergeant White Breeks as an enemy by no means to be despised; and on one occasion, when the Sergeant was rushing on in the Meadow Walk behind the street, just where there is a stone seat, and there was dismay among our boys and a falling back, Walter let fly at the Sergeant with a half brick, which hit him

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right on the side of the head and he fell.

Just then there was a cry "The Pegs!" and we cleared out pretty quick. Walter kept me with him, and Johnny Junor was with us. We hid in a cellar behind No. 21, down the stair in the entry, and never stirred till we knew that the scrape we would be in at home if we were any later would be as bad as being taken up for the manslaughter of Sergeant White Breeks.

When cricket came in fashion Walter was the captain of the Caledonian Club, the best wicket-keeper, the swiftest and straightest bowler, and the best batter in the club, and the club was second to none in Scotland. But let not the young man glory in his strength. When coming home from cricket one evening shortly after his marriage, Walter jumped clean

over the Meadow Gate. He felt cold through the night and rose out of bed, and then fell helpless on the floor. He lived for some months, but never from that moment had the smallest use of his limbs. He had to undergo more than once a cruel cauterising, but except that the hand of his friend who sat beside him was pressed as in a vice, no token of pain or sound of complaint was made by him. I do not remember of any one I ever knew for whom in every way I had a more sincere respect and admiration and a truer regard, than I had for Walter Oliphant, and this was coupled with a feeling that I was not worthy of being honoured with the friendship he always bore for me.

Of nearly the same standing, but of a very different character, was George B——. George was as good at the use of his tongue as any



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boy among us ; he never wanted an answer or an excuse, but we remember well of the description of him given before himself by one of the boys. "George," he said, "is very fond of hitting the little keelies and getting up a bicker, but when it comes to hard knocks he has skulked away, and if he is in a bicker he roars 'Hally! Hally!' very loud, but he always keeps behind." It was the same at school ; George never was in a scrape. Boys who found themselves brought up for pœnas, or a palmying for some mischief of which George had been the promoter, were astonished to see him sitting in his place in the class with a benign, self-satisfied expression of countenance, as if he had never even in thought been guilty of such wickedness. When George had got the others fairly into the mischief, he, unobserved by them, had

slipped away and left them to bear the burden. He was also one of the big boys who were cruel in their tricks on the less boys, and I remember once when I told Walter of a nasty trick he had played, Walter said, "Well! I have a good mind to make you fight him. He is a bully, but he is a coward; and if you could get up to his face, I think that you would thrash him."

A family of the name of JUNOR came into the street very early in our recollection; they lived for a time in No. 8, and then flitted to No. 11. The oldest son married a rather celebrated beauty in the South Side and went to India, and two boys remained, who were thoroughly "our boys." They were pleasant, good-natured fellows, and their house was always an agreeable one for the boys to go

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to, for it was Liberty Hall. The head of the house was an old aunt, Miss Bruce, a very worthy person, who gave the boys all their own way. When they flitted to No. 11, which was a rambling sort of a house with two main doors, the whole of the boys proceeded to make an inspection of the back green, which under the previous occupancy had been forbidden ground. It was a tolerably large and pretty garden, with a fine vinery, and two houses, one fitted up as a bath-house, the other as a summer and tool-house. Talk about an irruption of Goths! an irruption of boys is ten times more to be feared. That vinery was in fine order when the boys got admittance to the garden, in a week there was not a pane of glass in it, and very soon the wood work was used up for fires, and the

very bricks removed to show the course of the flue which had been used for heating.

The bath-house was a source of continual delight. The water had been cut off, but a big stone bath remained, and on the Saturdays it was a ploy to carry water from a cellar not far off to fill the bath, and then every boy who took his share of the "filling" had his share of the "dooking." The garden had a door from the back green which was common to the stair above the house, and it had a door to the lane leading to the Meadows; it was thus a most central position, and was for a long time the regular playground of the street, being moreover an admirable centre for tig on the dykes.

At length the old aunt, Miss Bruce, died, and her household was broken up, and the

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household goods were sold by auction, and we saw the pictures and furniture which had been so familiar to us carried away on brokers' hurleys. One long panoramic picture of Mayence and its bridge of boats stood long in a broker's shop near the end of West Nicolson Street. The house was divided after that, Nos. 9 and 11 being separated and a wall run up the middle of the garden to divide it in two.

In this same house, No. 11, there succeeded Miss Bruce, Mr Scott, a painter, a decent man with a randy wife, who sometimes took a drop too much. One Saturday evening when I went out I found a lot of boys at her door. They were throwing each other's hats down the area and then running down the one stair and up the other to recover them,—she meantime

trying to catch the boys and screaming loudly. In the middle of the fun came the policeman and took down the names of those he knew, who were all summoned to the Police Court at the instance of Mrs Scott, when she swore that we had filled her house with smoke from a kale runt filled with burning tow which we blew into the keyhole,—it was not true, and we got off all right.

One evening in May, when we got out to play with the other boys, we found a gathering, in the centre of which, and evidently himself the centre of attraction, was a handsome boy, the possessor of an india-rubber ball which the boys were trying to catch, and which was a novelty among us. We had never seen him before. No one of the boys had ever seen him, but the family to which he belonged had that day come to the

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street, and his name was Willie Dunn. Boys never stand on an introduction, and we were at once on the best terms. Willie was a fine, clever, honest boy, good at shinty and at all our games.

He came next day to the "Academy," and being put into the same class with us, he and I sat next each other all the time he was at the school. Willie had a brother in somewhat delicate health, who, on that account, did not go to school, but kept up with us at home. They were the sons of a clergyman of somewhat aristocratic connection, who had been minister of the Canongate Chapel, but had died early; and the boys lived with an uncle who had been Presbyterian minister at Rochdale. Willie established himself as a favourite in the street; but when he could not have been more than twelve

years of age, an uncle died at Sydney, leaving (it was said) vast wealth in land and cattle to Willie, his heir-at-law. It appeared necessary, therefore, that Willie should go out to receive his inheritance, and he, without loss of time, went to London by the smack and sailed for Sydney. This would be in 1834, when our Australian Colonies were thinly populated and were very little known. It was certainly a great venture for so young a lad, but he and we pictured the untold wealth he was to get, and the illimitable land whereon he was to be monarch of all he surveyed. We remember when the time came that he should leave, how his brother came to our house unable to bear the parting, and how we sat with the poor, weeping boy, but watched at the window when the hackney coach bore Willie away, and the boys gave



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him three cheers. We got short and scant news of Willie in New South Wales, and we thought in his newly acquired wealth he had forgotten his companions. But twenty years after we met Willie in the street. He had arrived in Edinburgh the night before, and was on his way to seek us. Poor fellow, his scanty correspondence was easily explained. When he arrived at Sydney he found no inheritance at all! What had come of it was never clearly explained, but all he could learn was that his uncle had died in debt, and that his property had gone to pay his creditors, and the poor boy was left friendless and penniless in this new country. He had, however, bravely fought his way, had taken service up the country at a cattle station, and had wrought and saved till he got a station of his own. But the life was in many

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respects a hard one,—living mostly entirely alone, no one with him with whom he could converse. At length, when he had made enough to keep him, he made his way home, but ill luck pursued his landing in England as well as in New South Wales, for when he came to draw the money he had remitted home by bills, they were dishonoured, the Bank either here or out there having become insolvent. Willie spent most of his time here with us, much pleased at having the run of the house, and being allowed to sit and smoke, with no one to ask him any questions or force him to converse, for this was an accomplishment which he had almost forgotten. I happened at that time to get a parcel of a kind of tobacco called Barrett's Nailrod, and it was curious to see the delight which overspread his face when I gave it

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him. It was the kind which he tried hard to get at Sydney on his annual furnishing expedition, to keep him going through the year in the bush, and had been his solace through many a lonely month. He found it necessary to set to work again to repair his shattered fortune, so he married a Scotch farmer's daughter, and went to Illinois. I dare say that very seldom has there been so young an emigrant entirely on his own hook, and seldom has a boy of twelve fought so stout a battle entirely unassisted.

The Reform movement in the years 1831-32 made a great impression on the minds of the boys. At first we did not strongly espouse the cause of Reform, and were inclined to jeer at the men who brought in the Bill for giving everybody everything. What first made it decidedly popular among us was the great

Reform Procession of 1832, which was the greatest popular demonstration Scotland had ever seen. The Trades met on the Links, marched down the Lothian Road and along Princes Street, each with its banners, insignia, and band of music. Each had prepared its banner for the occasion, and no labour or skill had been spared. A great procession some summers ago about the "Masters and Servants Act," put me somewhat in mind of it, but seemed immeasurably inferior. The Reform Demonstration was quite a new thing; it was the outcome of a long dormant spirit in the people, asserting their right to think for themselves—it was the first time any one had the opportunity of joining in a popular movement on such a large scale, and it went a far way to push into popular favour the cause of Reform. The boys were now keen

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Whigs. When petitions were to be signed for "the Bill," we went in troops at our play hours round the places where the sheets were laid out, and signed every one of them.

Although we were ourselves kept out of the mischief, we quite approved of the crowd breaking the windows of all who refused to light up at the illumination for the passing of the Bill. But what most interested us was the first popular Parliamentary Election—whereat we were all keen supporters of Jeffrey and Abercrombie. We all managed to get cockades of buff and blue, and we gathered about the polling place in George Square, and cheered lustily for our candidates, and then adjourned to the front of Mr Blair's Committee Room in No. 13 of Our Street, and groaned as lustily for the Tory. But although we were Whigs, we abhorred the

Radicals, and were utterly confounded at hearing it whispered that Mr Moffatt, our Writing Master, had voted for the Radical Aytoun. We could not believe it: it was impossible that a man whom we respected, the Teacher who made every boy feel him to be a personal friend, should be a Radical: the thing was absurd. No! no! a Tory was aristocratic although unpopular. A Whig was what a man ought to be! but a Radical!! No. A man who would not be ashamed to wear a green cockade, why, one must be ashamed of *him*.

Before this time a change had taken place in school matters. At the time of which we spoke first, the bigger boys all went to the High School, the younger boys and girls to Andrew's or Lennie's schools, and to Moffatt's and Whitelaw's for Writing and Arithmetic.

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But a young man, Mr William Maxwell Gunn, conceived the idea of setting up an Academy where all the branches could be had under one roof—and he commenced what he styled the Southern Academy at No. 1 Buccleuch Place. His ideas were certainly ambitious, his commencement was by no means so. Yet even in the germ there was the prospect of a great success.

Mr Scott Russel, the designer of the *Great Eastern*, taught Arithmetic and Mathematics, Mr Gunn himself taught the Classics and English Composition, and Mr Dalglish taught Writing. Monsieur Monnard taught French. During our course a quiet, studious lad named William H. Goold, whose father was a minister in the street, came to be assistant in the Classical department. When it came to our time to leave Andrew's School we went to the

Southern Academy, which was now removed to No. 22. We there found a great change from anything we had seen before. The rector, Mr Gunn, occupied a desk like a pulpit. He was clad in a gown, which, though it had in it many a rent, was emblematic of great authority. When we had anything to say to him it had to be communicated in writing : and what was very strange to us, the school was opened with prayer, and Scripture knowledge was a subject of regular teaching. The school had by this time attained large proportions ; all the boys in the street went to it, and a great many from Newington and all the Southern districts. The teaching in it was excellent, and it had advantages superior to either the High School or the smaller private schools. It had the prestige of a great school, and yet it had classes of a much more manageable size than the



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High School, so that even the boobies got a good share of the master's attention, and consequently, when they would not learn, a fair share of strap oil. In the Latin class with me were two boys who competed with each other for the bottom place: careless, mischievous, light-hearted boys, but kind-hearted, and easily led either to right or wrong, especially to the wrong. Gifford Scott and Benjie M'Laurin were as inveterate dunces as ever lived, in spite of all that was done for them in the way of palmies, which was a good deal, and inferred one trashing at least each day after the forenoon play hour. It never occurred to either of them to do anything to avert this diurnal recreation, but they exercised a great deal of ingenuity in preparing for it. They discovered a tree in the Meadows with a hole in it, and some sap in this hole which had a hardening

tendency on the hands, and here they stood during the play hour, with their jackets off and the hands of both of them rammed down the hole. Then they discovered a better system, and for a time they kept the secret to themselves. Every day, whenever the school got out, the two set out at the top of their speed, and it was only discovered by accident that they spent as much of their time as was not consumed by the running back and forward, lying on their stomachs with their hands in a tan pit at the West Port. When they left school we could get no account of what had become of either of them; years after we heard that Gif. Scott had been drowned while a seaman in a vessel sailing betwixt Glasgow and Montreal; but of Benjie M'Laurin no one heard anything. Not many years ago a tall, grave, earnest-

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looking man met me at the Register Office, and stopping said, "Sir, are you Nicholas Whitehead?" (Nicholas' death had taken place just at the commencement of a session, and Benjie had left school at the end of the previous session, just two months before it.) I said, "No! but the man who asks that question must be a very old acquaintance. I am J—— L——, who are you?" "Do you remember Benjie M'Laurin?" When we got to our house I found that he was, and had been for a good while, master of a large American ship, and I subsequently ascertained what one would judge by intercourse with him, that he was a most respectable, careful, successful master, and very strict in his discipline. Certainly he had been of the class whom to spare the rod is to hate. The order kept in the Academy was exceedingly good, and allowed of a good

deal of liberty being taken with it without any hurt. We used, for example, to be allowed to hold our "divisions" in the back green in very hot days, and such licence rather put the boys on their honour as to behaviour. There were some boys, generally boobies, whose comicalities sometimes upset the gravity of both masters and boys. I suspect that the boobies never saw the comicality themselves: it was their sheer stupidity which was laughable. One boy, David Buchan, was a great dunce and a great fighter; he never knew when he was beat, and cared little for a thrashing either with the fists or the taws. He had a strong squint of one eye. David was like the Highland man's terrier, life was full of seriousness to him, he could never get half enough of fighting; he was always trying to provoke us to fight, and would poke at us

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with his finger saying, "Eh! Henny, Henny!" One day when the classes met after play hour, David appeared in a battered white hat which he had picked up, with his head pushed so far in that the crown was pushed out. The appearance of his skelly eye through the crown of the hat set us all in a roar, and some good boy immediately took the hat off his head and threw it over the window just before Mr Gunn came in. He saw the laugh just disappearing, and asked what it was. It was David Buchan. "David, what did you do?" "It was the hat." "Where is the hat?" "Over the window." "Bring it up. Now, sir, what did you do?" "I did that," said David showing his strabismus out of the skylight of the hat, but looking as grave as a judge. Mr Gunn had to be a boy again for the time and laugh with the rest.

After Scott Russel left, Mr Johnston, or

“Sprug,” as he was always called, was the Arithmetic Master, and he was justly respected. The French Master was M. Monnard. It was counted the correct thing to play tricks on the French man. It was counted great fun to put shoemaker’s resin on his chair. It was a common trick to hide the Frenchman’s hat. Two or three were leaders in the tricks, but we were all *participes criminis*; and I for my part felt ashamed when I saw the pained expression, but gentlemanly, uncomplaining spirit of poor Moosay.

The kitchen of the house occupied by the Academy was surrounded with pegs for the boys’ hats, and was dignified with the name of “the Hall.” In wet weather it was the only place where the boys could meet, and sometimes there was great fun there. The Janitor Stewart, lived in the back kitchen, and there

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sold his baps out of an old iron deed box, and the boys ate their pieces in the Hall. One day it was announced as a great secret, that there was to be a prize fight in the Hall, and accordingly the place was crammed, except the ring where were the prize fighters and their seconds. It was a well-fought fight, there was great show of fence, but ever and anon there was a ringing blow which seemed to demolish the unfortunate recipient. I at least thoroughly believed in the genuineness of the fight, and felt relieved when some "tale pyet" informed Mr Gunn and brought him down to stop the murder. Mr Gunn at once saw the hoax, and we all of course pretended that we had never taken it for anything but what it was, a capital piece of skill and acting. The prize fighters were Crawford Allan and Robert Blyth, who was the ablest of all the Blyths, and now

spends his time in philanthropic work,—a man as unlike a prize fighter as it is possible to imagine.

It was a common thing for us on Saturdays in summer to go in troops to Portobello to bathe, through the Queen's Park and Duddingston. There was an ancient thorn tree at Abercorn gate, where we used to rest, and which was the scene of many an argument as to Queen Mary, who was said to have planted it with her own hand. On the beach at Portobello, we used to crowd as many as we could into one machine, and there was great fun urging the boys who did not naturally take to the water to take their proper dips. We thought we had done great things when we had managed to swim to the beacon.

One necessity of the bathing was the "chittering chack" which we always bought



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from Proudfoot the baker at the top of Regent Street.

Sometimes, but not very often, after the railway was opened from St Leonards, we got a trip to Dalhousie.

This railway was counted a great thing then. It was the first passenger railway in our part of the country, and it was accounted a great feat to go by it, for its start was through a dark tunnel in which was a steep gradient, down which the carriages ran by their own weight, and a gruesome thing it was to be rushing through the dense darkness, amid the loud noise made by the descending carriages and by those which were ascending at the same time on the other line of rails. When the carriages arrived at the foot they had each a horse attached to it and set off, having a boy beside the driver, whose duty it was to run

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before and sort the several points. Horses and men took it leisurely, stopping at any place to take up or set down a passenger, and when they met a car coming in the opposite direction, they would stop in order that the drivers might have a crack,—which they had with their legs thrown over the splash board, greatly to the edification of the passengers,—the subject being generally themselves and their horses, with enquiries if Jock's meer was sound yet, and if the brown horse was much the worse of his fall, and if the break of his knees was a bad one, or if the jint oil had come out. Once we heard a conversation as to the death of a brother of one of the drivers, which had happened the day before. No. 1: "An' Tam's dead." No. 2: "Aye, man; just about twal, he slippit away like a lamb." No. 1: trying to think of some word of consolation,

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something appropriate in the circumstances: "Eh, man, but he was aye tasty tasty about his horse graith."

There was a diverging line to Fisherrow, which was on a gradient such that it was usual to unyoke the horse and fasten it behind the carriage. One day the driver had been using the whip pretty freely to make the horse go, greatly to the grief of an old lady passenger; but when they got to the gradient and put the horse behind, and the carriage went fully as fast as it had been enabled to do by all the whipping, her righteous spirit could stand no longer the thought of the unnecessary cruelty, and she broke out on the man, calling him a cruel monster, and what could he mean by it except sheer wickedness? for the machine went faster without the horse than it had gone with it!

When railways became more common and steam locomotives were used elsewhere, our railway got the sobriquet of the Innocent Railway.

Not exactly in the street, but in the part of George Square looking to the street, and in a house whose door was turned towards the street, lived a family of old ladies who greatly amused the boys. From our earliest recollection they all had been very old, but their dress was juvenile and gay. On their door was a very old oval brass plate, "Alexander Robertson, Advocate," but never in our day had there been any member of the family except the maiden sisters, of whom there were four. We used from the street to see them dressing at their mirrors, and they never thought of drawing their blinds as they used the hare's foot to their cheeks, which we

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knew were beholden to art for their fine complexions. Even in age they showed the remains of beauty of a high order, and their manners and bearing were courtly. It was said that one of them had been engaged to a Duke of Buccleuch, and, though the pigs had run through the match, neither she nor any of her sisters would henceforth accept the suit of anything under an Earl. I had been sent one day to pay some rents to Mr John Irving, cousin of and agent for Sir George Clark, and knowing that I was from "Our Street," he said: "And when did you see Jess Robertson? and how was she?" I replied that I had seen Miss Robertson getting into a carriage the previous day, and that she looked well. "Ah!" said he, "she's a bonny lass Jess Robertson: but what am I speaking of? she was a bonny lass forty

years before you were born—but eh, laddie, she 's a proud ane.”

They had a butler who did not live in the house but came every morning, and entered by the back door, and on account of some proof of his agility, we always called him “Loup the Dykes.” Loup the Dykes after his hours of duty, and the same man when handing his ladies to a carriage were very different persons.

They required the minutest detail to be done in the very best manner, and although we felt the style of the old ladies to be an anachronism, we could not laugh even when we saw them, when far up in years, and failing fast, yet dressing and trying to look in the style of what they had been more than half a century before, when the Assembly Rooms were in Our Street, and they were

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leaders in the throng of fashion which congregated there.

We had our attention called one day to the arrival of a family to occupy the street door of No. 29. They were evidently from the country, and the furniture had come a long way. From the number of packages filled with books it appeared to be the family of a clergyman, and so it turned out to be the widow and family of Dr Hamilton of Strathblane, who were just undergoing one of the sore griefs a minister's widow has to bear in losing along with her husband the happy home they had hitherto enjoyed together. Besides the mother and two daughters, there were three lads in the family, one much older than we were, one not so much older, and one somewhat younger than we; but they were all shy of mixing with us street boys, for no doubt we would seem rough and

cheeky to lads who had been brought up in a rural manse. We came to know the oldest best, although he was nearly done with his terms as a divinity student, for he was a thorough boy although a big one, and liked an excursion on a Saturday to Blackford or Braid or Bonally as well as any; and knew better than we did the birds and the flowers and the plants which we saw in the Hermitage Dell or on the hills. We used to see in his little room some men of whom the world has since heard something, mostly Glasgow men, for James had gone through his Arts course at Glasgow College. Arnott was often there, for he and James had been close companions at Glasgow, as happy and boylike as James himself, only as fat as James was thin. And we once saw Robert M. M'Cheyne there, and often there was a Glasgow lad in delicate health, of whom



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James remarked as he introduced us to each other, "this is Halley, the man who beat Tait" (afterwards Archbishop of Canterbury). Of all the men of his years in both Edinburgh and Glasgow Universities, there was no one who gave so much promise of great things as James Halley, son of the Coal Check at the East end of Glasgow, who beat all the men of his time in their own departments, but died of consumption ere he was licensed for the ministry.

One autumn evening we met at the Hamiltons, Arnott and Halley and John Wright, who with James had just been a little tour by Stirling and the Hillfoots, and Dollar. They were in great glee, enjoying the reminiscences of their outing, and telling what they had seen and done. Of Halley they had to tell how, between Tillicoultry and Castle

Campbell, on the top of the coach, a "kleg" alighted on the collar of the coat of a stranger gentleman sitting before him, and Halley, quite excited, raised the great cudgel of a stick which he delighted to carry, and shouting to the gentleman to sit quiet, smote him and the kleg together a deadly blow; at least it was very nearly deadly to the gentleman, who could not understand the *rationale* of this method of slaughtering insects. James Hamilton was a most lovable and pleasant friend, but there was not in him or about him then anything to show that he would become one of the finest writers and most influential ministers of the age, the pastor of Regent Square Church, London.

In the next door to the Hamiltons there boarded for some years a man who rose to some eminence, James Caird. We had not

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known anything of what had come of him for a very long time, until some years ago having occasion to meet some of the Scotch Members of Parliament on public business we recognised in the member for Wigtown our old street friend, James Caird.

One of our street boys who has made a reputation is George Brown — we beg his pardon, the Honourable George Brown, quondam Prime Minister of Canada. George went from our street to America under disadvantageous circumstances, and by sheer force of character and indomitable determination made himself one of the first men in Canada, and perhaps the best known man in the Dominion. He came to an untimely end by violence, and his funeral in Toronto was the most remarkable display of public mourning Canada ever saw.

There still remains to us our much-loved boy and much respected man Dr William H. Goold, the venerable minister of the Martyrs' Church in Edinburgh, who has held the position of Moderator of first the Reformed Presbyterian Church, and then, after the junction, of the Free Church of Scotland, and who has much distinguished himself in theological literature and in connection with the circulation of the Holy Scriptures.

Those who were men and women in the days I have been speaking of have all passed away, and even of the boys and girls few remain to recount with one another the stories of the days of their youth. Some of the boys fell in the Crimea, and some in the great Indian Mutiny, fighting for their country. Many have distinguished themselves in various ways; some as eminent magistrates and lead-

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ing members of our civic corporation ; some as heads of those great commercial bodies, and those educational systems which have done so much for the prosperity of Edinburgh ; some as benefactors to Edinburgh and the world, by developing and extending the business of life insurance, of which their science and skill have greatly conduced to make Edinburgh the centre ; some as managers of banks and public companies ; some as ministers of the gospel and missionaries in heathen lands, and many as leading and successful men in business in various parts of the world ; and altogether we have no cause to be ashamed of either the girls or the boys of

OUR STREET.

JOSIAH LIVINGSTON.

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