

The Sugar Aristocracy.

PIG CLUB.

PREVIOUS to the breaking out of the unfortunate American war, in 1775, Glasgow may be said to have been almost exclusively a commercial City; and at that period wealth, as we have seen, was confined to but a few notable individuals, who lived apart, and rarely mixed with the other more numerous class of the population, who, comparatively speaking, were in but ordinary circumstances. The style and living of the two classes were totally different, and there was then a status, in point of rank and bearing, far more marked than what exists between the peer and the successful tradesman of the present day. The shock which this fatal war gave to the property of the City was terrible. Some of the Virginia lords ere long retired from the trade, and others of them were ultimately ruined. Business, for a time, was in fact paralysed, and a universal cry of distress was heard throughout the town. At length the exertions of the citizens were thrown into other channels—the West Indies offered its sugar cultivation to some, and the introduction of the cotton manufacture attracted others. Through these means, many years had not passed over before riches became more widely diffused, and a more general respectability became apparent. The chasm between the merchant and the tradesman was gradually being filled up; the difference of rank and position became less evident; and, along with this, a great improvement took place in the habitations and dress of the whole population. By the time that the French Revolution again brought the country into war, the City had increased very considerably; and, during the few years which preceded that event, foreign commerce was found to be daily increasing, while manufacturing establishments were rising on every hand. The fruits of this industry soon exhibited themselves in the extension of the City.

Handsome private mansions were being erected, both in the east and the west; while public edifices, devoted to religion or dedicated to amusement, were rapidly rising throughout the City. The general character of the people, which, at a more early period, was remarkable for its ascetic severity and apparent sanctity of manners, had somewhat changed; and the inhabitants of Glasgow had become, in liberality, more in unison with the feelings and conduct of their neighbours. The theatre was not now looked upon as altogether the temple of Satan. Mrs Siddons and Jack Bannister were patronised by most classes without compunction; while dancing—that enlivening pastime for the young—was as much encouraged as it had formerly been denounced. Times had changed, and manners too. Industry had produced wealth, and with it generally came increased comfort, and even luxury and elegance.

It was when Glasgow had reached this comparatively comfortable condition, that there arose a Club which, from the proud position attained in society by its several members, may well be designated a truly aristocratic fraternity. The Club to which we allude was certainly known by a very odd name; but the reason why that name was adopted is not now very certain. Under the designation of the PIG, a CLUB began its sittings in the month of October, 1798, and continued to assemble till the year 1807. It has, however, been suspected, and perhaps with some truth, that the origin of the fraternal symbol might be attributed to the necessary appearance of a roasted suckling, of six weeks old, being placed before the president at every Club dinner; but if this be found to be apocryphal, it is at least known for certainty, that the president was bound to wear round his neck, at every meeting, a silver chain, to which was attached the figure of a pig; and so strictly was this enforced, that on every occasion when the member occupying the chair appeared in the Club-room, either from hurry or neglect, without exhibiting the Club jewel, he was instantly fined in a bottle of rum for the benefit of the Club.*

* "May 9th, 1807.—The preses, Mr Gordon, is fined in a bottle of rum for neglecting to bring the pig."—*Club Minutes*.

This gustative and joyous brotherhood, who may be justly accounted the chiefs of the then dominant sugar aristocracy, and who also may be said to have patronised turtle as much as pig, never held their meetings in summer, but only during the cold and comfortless months of winter, and these were limited to one evening during the week. The session always commenced with a dinner, and was also closed by a repast of the same description. The fraternity, in their hebdomadal assemblies, met ostensibly for the purpose of playing whist—more, however, for pastime than for gain; and ever and anon wound up their gains or their losses with a hot supper and an hour's free and easy gossip. The annual subscription was thirty shillings, out of which, and the numerous bets that were greedily offered and taken, a large proportion of the expense of the weekly suppers and the whole charges attendant on the opening and closing dinners were paid.* All the bets which were offered, and they were most numerous and singular, were in bottles of rum, which, however, were necessarily convertible into the current coin of the realm, at the rate of eight shillings the bottle—a cost which, even in those days of protection and monopoly, must have satisfied the ideas of the most rampant Jamaica proprietor. The Club was, some time after its establishment, limited to twenty members, and those who were not present at its original formation were admitted by ballot; but the sieve was by no means small, as it required three black balls to exclude. It appears, also, from the minute-book, that the Club circle was occasionally enriched by the appearance of one or two favoured visitors,—seeing that the names of Mr Kirkman Finlay, Mr Samuel Hunter, Mr George Alston, Mr Dugald Bannatyne, and Major Craigie are found in the sederunts†—gentlemen whose well known conversational capabilities could not fail to add to the zest and hilarity of the meetings.

* The amount paid out for each evening supper was limited to 15s.

† LIST OF THE PIG CLUB.

Colonel James Corbet.
Professor Richardson.
Mr Gilbert Hamilton.
“ Henry Glassford

Mr John Gordon.
“ William Bogle.
“ John Alston.
“ Robert Muirhead.

The first individual who sat as preses of the Pig Club was the late Mr John Gordon of Aikenhead; and the same gentleman also presided on the 9th May, 1807, the date of the last recorded sitting. Perhaps few in the community held a more prominent position than this leading partner of the well known firm of Stirling, Gordon, & Co., whose members were then, and for a long period thereafter, justly regarded as the chiefs of the flourishing West India aristocracy. Mr Gordon and his partner, Mr Charles Stirling, were also looked upon as the central luminaries of the Tory party, then dominant in the City; and it was within the walls of their business establishment, that the leaders of Mr Pitt's most ardent supporters were always summoned, for consultation and counsel. Here the qualifications of gentlemen attempting to become Members of Parliament were canvassed, and hence came forth the decree that was to render them either eligible or not to a seat in the House of Commons. It was for many years the peculiar sanctum and safeguard of the interests of Mr Campbell of Blythswood; and hence it derived, through the great Parliamentary influence of that gentleman, a reciprocal power in matters connected with the Government and its patronage. Mr Gordon resided in an elegant mansion which, with its large garden, occupied the site of the Prince of Wales' Buildings in Buchanan-street; and while there, like the Member whom he so ardently supported, he was lavish in entertainments to his friends, which he conducted in a style of Apicean taste and luxury. He was always ready with his purse when City wants required his aid, heading, at that period, every subscription, whether opened as a tribute to the good or the brave, or as a fund for the relief of epidemic

Mr John Buchanan.
 " Archibald Smith.
 " John Maxwell.
 " John Leitch.
 " W. Craig.
 " Laurence Craigie.
 " James Black.
 " Thomas Hopkirk.
 " David Connell.

Mr Charles Stirling.
 " Campbell Douglas.
 " Cunningham Corbet.
 " Colin M'Lachlan.
 " Archibald Wallace,
 " Patrick Carnegie.
 " John Blackburn.
 " William Maxwell.
 " Colin Thomson.

disease or manufacturing distress; while he did not fail to imitate the perhaps too sensitive benevolence of his other large-hearted associate in business, Mr Fyffe, in his daily gifts to the wandering mendicancy which ever tracked the latter gentleman's footsteps.*

While it is true that the chairman of the Pig Club gained at that period no little celebrity, from the luxury and even magnificence of his private dinner parties, it is equally certain, from the cost of the dinners, as detailed in the minute-book kept by the secretary, the late Mr David Connell, that Glasgow had not then generally attained, in its prandial repasts, to such luxurious extravagance as she now exhibits. Bills of fare, tastefully lithographed, and printed in gold on white satin, and containing the multifarious list of a four or five course dinner, couched in a lingo almost unintelligible, save to a Ude or Soyer, were then undreamed of; while champagne, hock, and hermitage, now so common, were found in few private cellars in the City, far less in the public bar of a tavern. Rum punch was, in fact, the universal beverage of the members of the Pig at their dinners, as it was at those of all the other jovial fraternities in the City; and rum toddy was also, as elsewhere, the never failing accompaniment of every supper. Whisky, in those days, being chiefly drawn from the large flat-bottomed stills of Kilbagie, Kennetpans, and Lochrin, was only fitted for the most vulgar and fire-loving palates; but when a little of the real mountain-dew, from Glenlivet or Arran, could be obtained, which was a matter of difficulty and danger, it was sure to be presented to guests with as sparing a hand as the finest *Maraschino di Zara* is now offered by some laced lackey, or some butler-metamorphosed beadle, at the close of a first-class repast.†

* Mr John Gordon, after a long life of mercantile activity, of political consistency, of great hospitality, and of much charity, died on the 2d December, 1828. He was a jolly-looking well-made man, with rather a lordly bearing, and showed himself as strict a Conservative as Mr Walter Graham, by

sticking to breeches and stockings, after all the world had discarded them.

† Whisky seems to have only come down to the Lowlands after the Rebellion of 1745. In spite of all that is said against this stimulant, it is not the worst for so damp and dreary a climate as Scotland.

The minute-book of the Pig Club, which, although little more than a succinct chronicle of bets, and a distinct account of its revenue and expenditure, brings, however, to recollection the numerous topics of public interest which then prevailed, and serves as a sort of index to the hopes and fears which were then daily arising in the minds of all who had their country's welfare and happiness at stake, as had assuredly the several members of this Club. From these *munimenta disjecta*, we are reminded of the dread anxiety felt as to the result of Napoleon's Italian campaign, which was wound up so unfortunately for the Austrian cause at Marengo. We there behold mirrored the ever-changing aspects of the war in Egypt—closing with the victory of Alexandria and the death of Abercrombie. Next, we have recorded opinions respecting the peace of Amiens; then the probability of the new war—the threatened invasion of our island—the battles of Trafalgar and Austerlitz, which gave to England the sea and to France Europe. There, too, we find indices to our changing politics at home—the demise of Pitt, and the elevation of “all the Talents” to power—the death of Fox, and the restoration of the Tory rule. In short, we find there key-notes to the whole history of the hurly-burly conflict of notions and opinions which, perhaps, at that more than at any other time, afflicted a wicked world; and which, for the happiness of mankind, it is to be hoped may never again be repeated on a European stage.*

* The following few excerpts from the minute-book of the Club are taken at random:—

April 10, 1799. Colonel Corbet bets that the French will be driven out of Italy (Mantua excepted), by the 1st of October next. Mr Glassford says no. Colonel Corbet loses—paid 17th May, 1801.

March 9, 1801. Colonel Corbet bets with Mr Muirhead that by the 1st April there will not be a Frenchman in arms in Egypt. Colonel Corbet loses—paid 12th May, 1801.

August 3, 1801. Mr Craigie says the French will not attempt to land 10,000 men in Great

Britain or Ireland in three months. Mr Muirhead says they will. Mr Muirhead loses—paid 8th May, 1801.

17th March, 1802. That the definitive treaty will be signed on or before the last day of this month, or broken off altogether. Messrs Craigie and Black say yes. Messrs Glassford and Corbet, no.—The latter lose.

5th April, 1802. That in the event of a change of ministry, Mr Pitt and Mr Fox will not come in together. Messrs Glassford, Dunlop, and Bogle say yes. Messrs Gordon, Connell, and C. Corbet say no. The former lose—paid 11th May, 1805.

While the Pig Club thus busied itself with the leading topics of the day, it did not altogether forget matters of lesser moment connected with the City in which it met. The members, as a body, could occasionally patronise and pay for a ball, and were ever ready to assist at the winter assemblies, which, in those halcyon days for youthful beauty, were held *weekly* in the Assembly-rooms in Ingram-street, which were first opened on the 18th January, 1798. Alas! how changed has Glasgow become since that joyous period, when, out of a very limited population, a party of at least 460 sworn worshippers of Terpsichore could be mustered, on a Queen's birth-night, to take a part in the now almost neglected reel and country dance, then the only practised movements at a fashionable ball! And now, when the population has trebled—when wealth is more diffused—when music is so varied and improved—when, in short, everything looks apparently so favourable for the success of such assemblages, we find that our Assembly-rooms are abandoned; and that when a few, belonging to a certain coterie who still retain a portion of the dancing passion of their grandmothers, dreamed lately of a polka or a waltz, they were under the necessity of tripping it on the vulgar and unbending battens of the Trades' Hall! *Proh pudor!* say we, from our inmost heart; and in this sentiment, we are certain, we should have been joined by every member of the Pig Club, had they only lived to see to what a sad unsocial condition false pride, parvenu vulgarity, and wide-spread bigotry have brought us!

When we look over the array of names that made up the now long-forgotten Pig Club, we feel bound to acknowledge that it would be some-

August 31, 1804. That the French will land 10,000 men at one point within six months. Messrs M'Lachlan and C. Corbet, yes. Messrs A. Dunlop and G. Alston, no. The former lose—paid 11th May, 1805.

8th August, 1805. Colonel Corbet bets with Messrs Gordon, M'Lachlan, and Connell, that five ships of the line, part of the combined fleets, will be captured before they return to

port, over and above the two Spanish ships already brought in. Colonel Corbet loses—paid 15th May, 1806.

22d January, 1806. Mr Gordon bets with Mr Black that in the event of a change of ministry during the life of the King, Mr Fox will be in the new administration. Mr Black loses—paid 15th May, 1806.

what difficult, at the present hour, to select out of the wider field of the City's wealth, a body at once so influential and so similar in position, or men who, in the eyes of their fellow-citizens, could be looked up to as the really acknowledged rulers of Glasgow. The days of so limited and united a City aristocracy as prevailed at the middle and the close of the last century, however, are now gone. The territory is at present far too wide, and the combatants for high places far too numerous, for any coterie, however wealthy and honourable, to lead, far less to rule, the hundred and one circles of society into which Glasgow, by its almost unexampled progress, has been split. But whatever may be the advantages which have accrued, or may still accrue to the community from this altered state of men and things, it will at least be readily allowed, by every one who can look back to the social condition of Glasgow during the hey-day of the Pig Club, that such a fraternity will never again meet under such class circumstances or amid more momentous events.
